

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound

CANNES SPECIAL

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THE NEON DEMON

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- 'THE NICE GUYS' AND THE HISTORY OF THE BUDDY MOVIE ● 'EMBRACE OF THE SERPENT'

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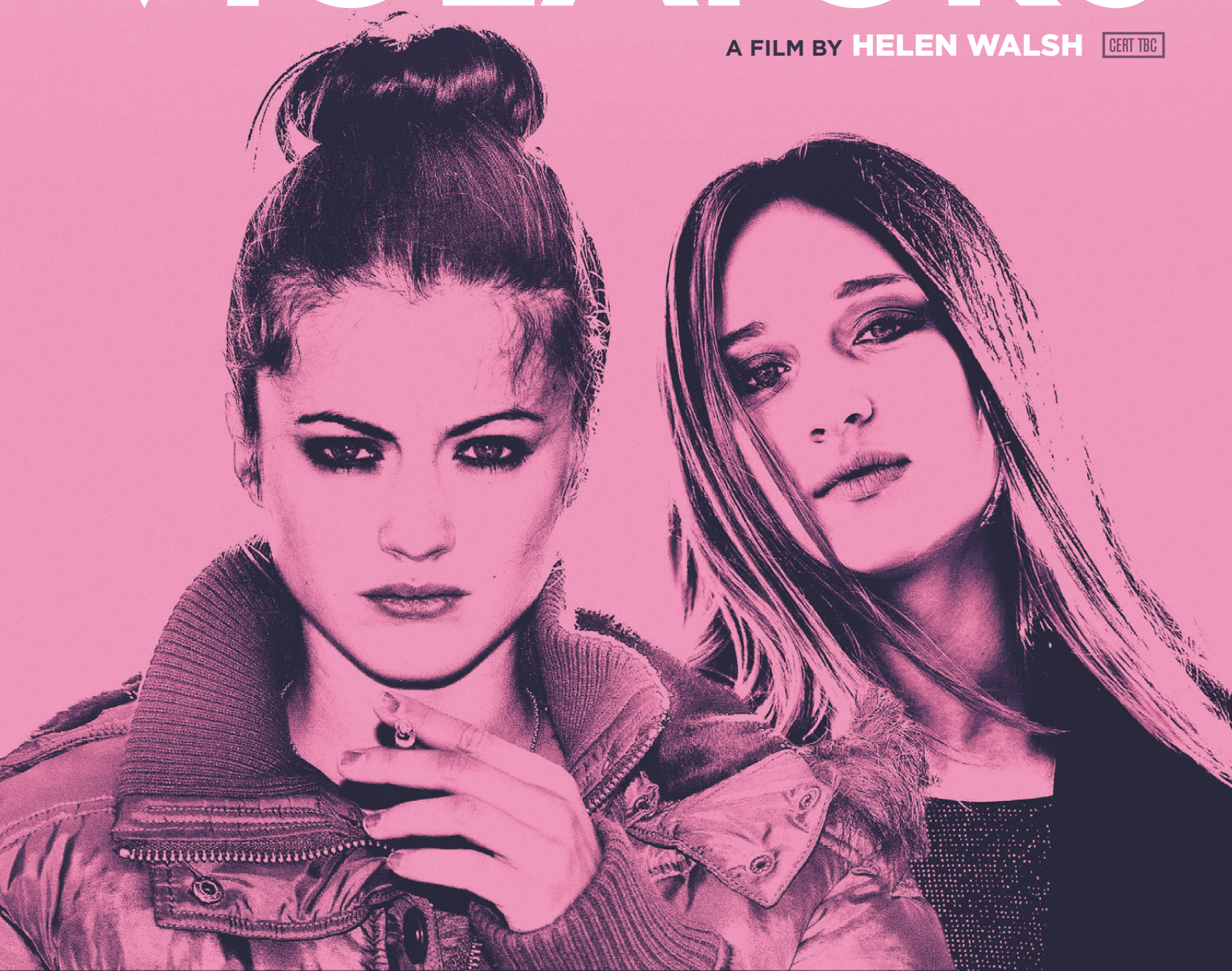
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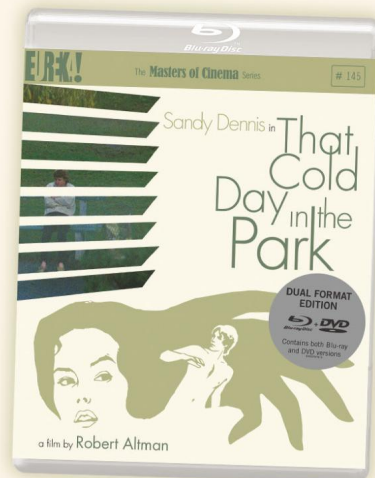


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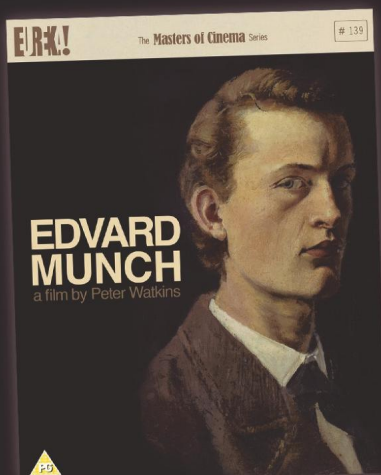


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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE BFI

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Volume 26 Issue 7 (NS)

ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

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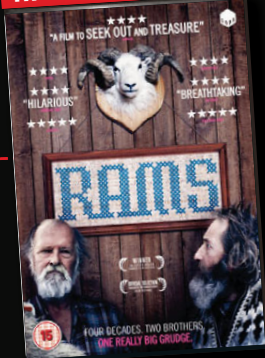
And online this month Apichatpong Weerasethakul's narcoleptic shorts | *Undercover* and *Line of Duty* | Sundance London, Sheffield Doc/Fest and more bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

new films



rams
also available on blu-ray
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film of the month



triple 9
also available on blu-ray
released 27/06/2016



the club
also available on blu-ray
out now



evolution
released 20/06/2016



nasty baby
also available on blu-ray
released 13/06/2016



youth
also available on blu-ray
out now

**eisenstein in
guanajuato**
also available on blu-ray
out now



heaven knows what
also available on blu-ray
released 20/06/2016



**it's so easy
(and other lies)**
released 20/06/2016

600 miles
out now



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Bookshop distribution

Central Books

T: 020 8986 4854

Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by Mail Right Int., 1637 Stelton Road B2, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Periodicals Postage Paid at Piscataway, NJ and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight and Sound c/o Mail Right International Inc. 1637 Stelton Road B2, Piscataway NJ 08854

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For subscription queries and sales of back issues and binders contact:

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Annual subscription rates:

UK £45, Eire and ROW £68

£10 discount for BFI members



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The BFI is a charity, (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN



Editorial Nick James



STORIES WE TELL

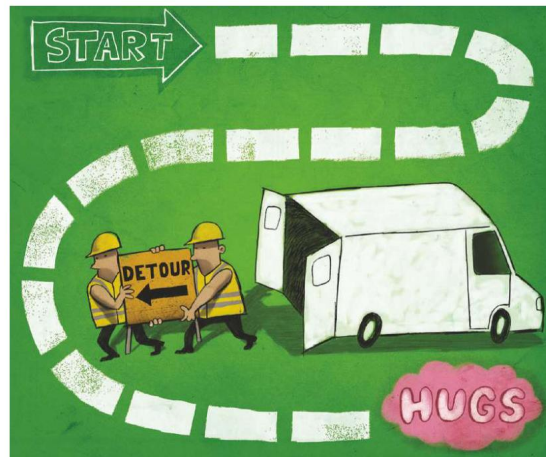
I don't always come back from the Cannes Film Festival on a high, but this year I did. What's interesting about what people normally leave with – aside from a need to get some sleep and go to the gym – is that it's not the incidents of glamour or controversy that stick, but the imprint of the films. And that's just as true of the ones that don't quite come off as it is of those that thrill and move you. Indeed you can also get excited about films that don't yet exist, whether they're real possibilities announced in the trade press or fantasies forming in your imagination from fragments of what you've seen. I'm not going to get into the content of the actual films in the programme much here because my Cannes report is also in this issue (see page 18), but I do want to consider how they reflect cinema's aesthetic ambitions, especially in terms of storytelling.

We're constantly told that storytelling is what cinema is all about, as if the experiments of modernism and postmodernism never happened. And indeed most of our moving image culture continues to follow the linear 'journey' model. If you watch UK TV shows, based on the *MasterChef* model, you will hear this buzzword time and again. (If you played a drinking game in which you downed a glass every time you heard it, you'd end up in hospital). Many popular TV programmes are structured around a struggle to understand and master some activity, moving towards success and a big hug ending. Gareth Malone's *The Choir* is a typical, often moving, example, and even artist Grayson Perry's insightful masculinity investigation *All Man* follows a similar plan.

If there's one place you'd not expect the touchy-feely 'journey' to be dominant, it's Cannes. The kind of art cinema the festival has long encouraged has a colder edge to it. Its stories challenge and complicate expectations – something that was as true this year as any. Films such as Olivier Assayas's *Personal Shopper* and Cristi Puiu's *Sieranevada* leave us hanging, having to work out a resolution for ourselves. The absurdist narratives of Alain Guiraudie and Bruno Dumont mock the audience's continuing faith in fables, even as they tell one themselves.

These are all variants of the art cinema that's predominated in festivals for the last 15 years or so. There's a thread of thematic concerns between films from year to year which creates a kind of Cannes-centric cinema of its own. Individual as directors such as the Dardennes and Almodóvar are, it sometimes seems as if they and others at Cannes are making films as much for the festival as they are for an audience.

Will the price for including a new generation of auteurs at the Cannes Film Festival be a more conventional, therapeutic approach to narrative?



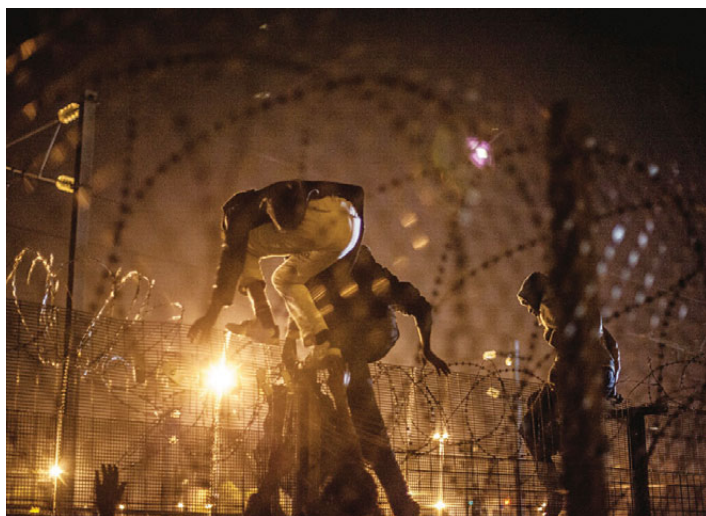
Their films have added to my post-festival buzz, but if I want to talk about cinema that really reaches for new experiences, I'm not looking at them.

I'd look instead at *Divines*, Houda Benyamina's feature debut, received rapturously by the Cannois public (see our report on page 23). What distinguishes the film is its energy, its astonishing lead Oulaya Amamra, and certain imaginative set pieces; otherwise, it follows precisely that TV journey from struggle to hugs, albeit with tragedy as the price of achievement. This raises the question: will the price for including a new generation of auteurs at Cannes be a more conventional, therapeutic approach to narrative? Is that the zeitgeist? There are alternatives. One of the virtues of Andrea Arnold's vivid road movie *American Honey* is that the actual trip across America is the only 'journey', that her film is more interested in encounters between people than it is in 'closure' on the finish line – though its heroine Star does find wisdom by the end. Maren Ade's great comedy *Toni Erdmann* has a scene-by-scene focus, like a dance that will never end in a close embrace, yet it portrays a genuine human coming together of estranged father and daughter.

Or is the emptying out of narrative in Nicolas Winding Refn's *The Neon Demon* a future indicator? Here the 'journey' is minimised to a handful of incidents, each magnified and slow-paced to add up to 110 minutes. For decades the British director Peter Greenaway has argued that storybook literariness killed cinema – though it has always been hard to see in what way his own films exclude themselves from that accusation. But if ever a film came close to what he's talking about, it must be *The Neon Demon*. With true modernists like Godard and Haneke absent this year, I felt the one thing that was lacking in Cannes was something formally challenging. Still, it felt very much like a joyous transitional year. The changing of the guard is coming, which is one good reason to look forward to next year, hugs or no hugs. ☺

IN THE FRAME

GREAT EXPECTATIONS



Days in the life: Sheffield highlights include (clockwise from top left) *Exodus*; *Breaking into Europe*, *Notes on Blindness*, *Unlocking the Cage* and *Serena*

With a new leadership team in place at Sheffield Doc/Fest, can the UK's top showcase for nonfiction film replenish itself?

By Nick Bradshaw

Twenty-two this year, Sheffield Doc/Fest can claim its part in nonfiction cinema's recent-years renaissance, having been the only UK festival to wave the flag for documentary culture through the 1990s and 2000s, and developing a once heavily British TV-centric delegate base into something more buzzily eclectic and international, with regularly rising audience

numbers to prove it. Still, from a cinephile's perspective it's been patchy at representing the international creative cutting edge, and lately younger, smaller festivals have sprung up to meet that thirst: the second Essay Film Festival, the first Frames of Representation, and later in June the sixth Open City Documentary Festival. (All, notably, are London affairs.)

Before that, however, comes the first Doc/Fest

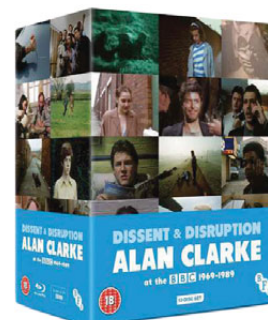
Edinburgh Film Festival

This year's event (15-26 June) is typically wide-ranging, with a programme including Pixar's 'Nemo' sequel 'Finding Dory', Gillies MacKinnon's remake of 'Whisky Galore!' and Johan Grimmonprez's doc about the international arms industry, 'Shadow World'. Retro highlights include a celebration of France's Cinéma du Look in the 80s and early 90s, including 'Diva' (right); a 70mm strand; and a programme of cult live comic-strip adaptations.



Alan Clarke

The 23 surviving standalone BBC dramas by one of Britain's most radical filmmakers have been collected for the first time on the BFI's comprehensive limited edition Blu-ray box-set (right) as well as on two smaller DVD packages. Included in the mix are idiosyncratic gems such as 'Penda's Fen' as well as furious classics like 'The Firm', which is included here in a newly discovered director's cut.



ON OUR
RADAR

under its newly assembled leadership, following key departures in 2014-15. Deputy director Melanie Iredale (from Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival) and head programmer Claire Aguilar (from ITVS) are now undertaking their second editions, with Elizabeth McIntyre (from Discovery Networks) taking charge for her first. (Mark Atkin, head of the festival's interactive Crossover Labs, took temporary charge last year; he's now curating the renamed Alternate Realities strand.) I visited McIntyre and Aguilar last month as they were finalising their programme.

The first thing to note is that the festival is a different order of scale from those younger niche endeavours. McIntyre doesn't take her eye off the constituencies she has to serve: "We're a hub to create mechanisms to bring people together, from new to emerging to established talent and decision-makers. And those new talents will be established filmmakers and decision-makers one day as well, and on goes the creative cycle," is her Zen summary.

Being outside London is important, too. "Sheffield is a very welcoming city. Its physical nature shouldn't be underestimated in terms of how it makes people behave: they're relaxed, friendly, approachable." (This year the funding forums and hangouts will move from the university Hubs to the grand old Cutlers' Hall, for added deep-carpet gentility.)

Certainly the fundraising initiatives seem to be doing something right: this year's festival is showing 12 films germinated in previous Meet Markets, and when I meet Atkin he points out that investments at last year's Alternate Realities pitching sessions were £1.5 million, six times the previous year's. McIntyre is also emphatic about impressing on (wannabe) filmmakers the variety of modern nonfiction formats: "The industry is changing in terms of how films are made and where they go; there's a whole spectrum from theatrical releases to short-form and self-publishing, each equally valid. We need to show filmmakers they can come to the table with a range of projects. If you've got just one pet project, you're creating an unsustainable model for yourself; if you can also propose a wonderful format or series, or a number of shorts, it allows you to think differently about not just the creative process but also the business process."


Surely, Doc/Fest spans as many forms as any festival. Atkins runs through the details for me of his burgeoning AR summit and Virtual Reality and interactive exhibitions, which this year include ARTE's interactive version of *Notes*



Michael Moore's *Where to Invade Next*.

on *Blindness*, in tandem with the film version (reviewed on page 86), Aardman's first VR doc *We Wait* (a journey with Syrian refugees) and a virtual Holocaust survivor from the Shoah Foundation. Aguilar briefs me on her inclusion of serial episodes (the BBC's *Exodus: Breaking into Europe*), TV pickups (EPIX's *Serena: The Other Side of Greatness*) and sundry up-to-40-minute shorts ("They're not going to take forever but are definitely cinematic") upon which a Doc/Fest screening confers Oscar-qualification status.

But McIntyre is also quick to acknowledge the dangers of unwieldiness and "so much going on that you can't navigate your way through it". For me the saddest moments at Doc/Fests past have been seeing smaller discoveries lost in the grind, not least when the filmmakers have come from afar to share and gauge their work. It's a big-festival hazard – I've seen the same at IDFA in Holland – and, as Aguilar agrees, a problem when your delegates are stuck in meetings: "What can we do to make it easy for people? We've got to change it so the films won't be ghettoised, and we privilege the filmmaker."

So far as public audiences go, the festival has plumped for doubling down on its outreach: opening up the delegate tent on Tudor Square and a free outdoor screen beside it; a Door-to-Docs initiative to bus in out-of-towners. There are new loose strands, from 'Get Up and Dance' to 'No Place Like Home'; and big-name speakers from Michael Moore to D.A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus to Joanna Lumley, but also snooker champion Ronnie O'Sullivan, back at the Crucible to reveal his secret documentary inspirations. 

i Sheffield Doc/Fest runs from 10-15 June. Open City Documentary Festival runs from 21-26 June. Erika Balsom considers the 'documentary turn' in the art world on page 50, and Ben Nicholson reports on Frames of Representation at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

LISTOMANIA FILMS ABOUT PREGNANCY

Few films addressed pregnancy in any depth until recently; *Maggie's Plan* (see page 80) is the latest in a swelling line of dramas on the subject

- 1 **Sasha (1930)**
Aleksandra Khokhlova
- 2 **A Taste of Honey (1961)**
Tony Richardson
- 3 **Rosemary's Baby (1968)**
Roman Polanski
- 4 **Hail Mary (1985)**
Jean-Luc Godard
- 5 **Junior (1994)**
Ivan Reitman
- 6 **Children of Men (2006)**
Alfonso Cuarón
- 7 **Juno (2007, below)**
Jason Reitman
- 8 **Inside (2007)**
Julien Maury, Alexandre Bustillo
- 9 **Obvious Child (2014)**
Gillian Robespierre
- 10 **Second Coming (2014)**
debbie tucker green



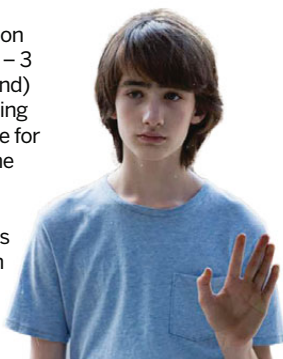
QUOTE OF THE MONTH MEL BROOKS

"Tragedy is if I cut my finger.
Comedy is if I walk into
an open sewer and die"



East End Film Festival

Now in its 15th edition, the London event (which runs from 24 June – 3 July in venues across the East End) is one of the capital's most exciting festivals, and one that has an eye for new talent. The main programme includes Ira Sachs's 'Little Men' (right) and Tobias Nölle's 'Aloys', while other highlights are a focus on Turkish cinema, a celebration of 40 years of punk filmmaking and a timely strand on films about refugees.



Isabelle Huppert

The great French actress (right) will look back over her career and talk cinema with director Stephen Frears at the Ciné Lumière, London, on 12 June. That same day she will also discuss her 2006 film 'Gabrielle' at the Barbican, and on 18 June she will introduce a screening of Barbara Loden's hard-to-see 1970 classic 'Wanda' at the Whitechapel Gallery, having been one of the first to champion the lost film by releasing it in France.



UNDER THE SKIN



Dead glamorous: (clockwise from top left) *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), *Carol* (2015), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *The Big Heat* (1950)

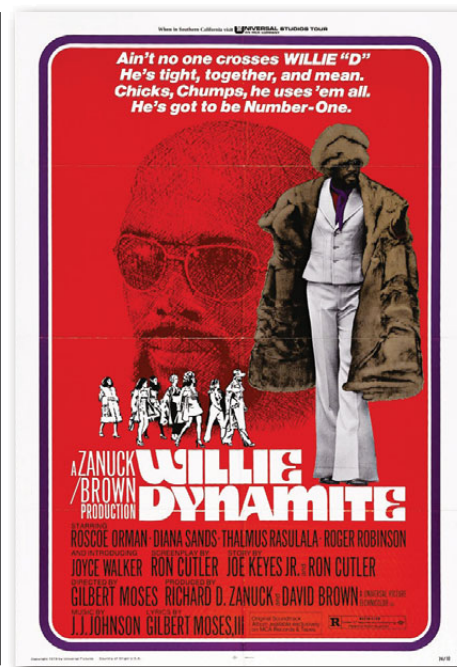
Furs in films are a sign of both success and corruption, with the hint that something must have been sacrificed in order to get one



By Hannah McGill

"We're sisters under the mink," ruined good-time girl Debby tells bitter blackmailing wife Bertha in *The Big Heat* (1953), shortly before putting her to death. "Fresh killed?" Jean asks Terry as the latter unpacks her fur coat in *Stage Door* (1937). "I worship furs," declares Cruella De Vil in *101 Dalmatians* (1961). "Is there a woman in all this wretched world who doesn't?" A fur certainly forms part of the constructed womanliness of the title character of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001), who tells her audience about an animal rights activist asking her, "What poor, unfortunate creature had to die for you to wear that?" "My aunt Trudi," comes her response.

At once status symbol and *memento mori*, fur as fashion carries associations both glamorous and sad. Even if she hasn't been daubed with red paint like Hedwig, the wearer of a fur has implicitly been blooded: some sort of unsavouriness, economic or sexual or both, lies behind her appropriation of something else's skin. Debby and Bertha are sisters because both have given up their goodness in exchange for goods; and both, having lost or been robbed of their beauty, are left with luxury spoils in place of love. Furs on women imply success, but also corruption. Something has been sacrificed. "You gotta get up early in the morning to catch a fox, and stay up late at night to get a mink," runs one of Mae West's salty aphorisms, while another old joke has it that "girls get minks the same way minks get minks". In *Monte Carlo* (1930), Jeanette MacDonald's impulsive, cash-strapped countess is dressed in just a fur coat and underwear when she bolts from her wedding to go gambling instead. Margo in *All About Eve* (1950), a film filled with status furs, distils the matter in wondrously world-weary fashion when she notes her plan to marry in "something simple: a fur coat over a nightgown".



Even if the fur-wearing woman is not ambitious and sexually knowing, she can expect to be taken as such. *Easy Living* (1937) at once plays to and lampoons Depression-era fantasies of immoral luxury, as Jean Arthur's working woman Mary inadvertently acquires a fabulously expensive sable coat, and sees her life thrown into disarray as a result. Mistaken for a rich man's mistress, she loses her job; the gulf between America's haves and have-nots is embodied in the figure of a woman clad in a \$58,000 fur but unable to afford dinner.

So powerful is the modern association of animal pelts with the commodification of the female body that it pervades even the use of fur in men's fashion – or has since the 1970s, when Blaxploitation cinema helped to promote the image of the pimp as postmodern peacock. The befurred gangster-cum-pimp, as seen in *Willie Dynamite* (1973) and *The Mack* (1973) and still referenced in the fashion and imagery associated with hip-hop culture, is a subversive archetype of black economic aspiration and male sartorial flamboyance – an example, in the words of the academic Eithne Quinn, of “black working-class males spectacularly refusing, through heightened style politics, the subservient typecasting that has historically been imposed on them”. Such exotic styling also carries negative associations, of course – not only for the female sex workers whose position remains explicitly subservient, but for the black males whose physicality and sexuality is linked via fur, animal prints and plumage to the jungle.

Increased concern over animal welfare having complicated the standing of fur as a signifier of status and sexual power, it has more recently carried poignant or ironic overtones on screen. The coat worn by Margot in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) was the genuine article – fox fur specially crafted for the film by Fendi – but it was thrown on over a tennis dress as if it was flea-bitten vintage or fake. It gave Margot the look, as *Glamour* magazine put it, of “a

‘What poor, unfortunate creature had to die for you to wear that?’ Hedwig is asked. ‘My aunt Trudi,’ comes her response

young girl who had been rummaging around in her mum's wardrobe”, thus underlining the film's tone of yearning for childhood innocence, old money and lost familial bonds. The flamboyantly furry overcoat affected by groupie Penny Lane in *Almost Famous* (2000) is an ironic appropriation of those earlier furs worn by social-climbing bad girls – ironic, because Penny is a secret good girl, interested not in money or marriage, but in love. The same might be said of the eponymous heroine of Todd Haynes's *Carol* (2015), first seen swathed in a coat of real golden fur. Liveliness and novelty enter in the form of Therese, who, when the pair first meet, is wearing a fake-fur-trimmed Santa hat: bright, unsophisticated directness as a counter to all that is expensive, classy and long dead in Carol's life. 📌

THE FIVE KEY...

FASHION INDUSTRY FILMS

If any business is more glamorous (and shallower) than film, it's fashion – no wonder Hollywood keeps looking to it for inspiration

By Abbey Bender

The surface glamour of the fashion industry – and the sleaze and greed hidden beneath the surface – make it a tempting subject for cinematic treatment. Through the years there have been many attempts to convey industry drama on screen, from *Blood and Black Lace*, Mario Bava's 1964 Italian slasher film involving models and a masked stalker, to the comparatively frothy *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), with its archetypal bitchy fashion editor, to the documentaries on designers that seem to come along every year. Nicolas Winding Refn's *The Neon Demon* highlights the dark side of fashion; in honour of its release, here are five key films about the industry's frivolities and fierceness.



2 Blowup (1966) Michelangelo Antonioni's experimental narrative, about a bad-boy fashion photographer (David Hemmings) who believes he has snapped a murder, features perfect mod ensembles and geometrically composed photoshoots. Contemporary supermodel Veruschka makes an appearance, and the film captures a disaffected and provocative but always impeccably dressed counterculture.



4 The Eyes of Laura Mars (1978) A thriller set in the gaudy fashion world of the late 1970s. While the psychological plot twists are convoluted, it's notable for featuring a female fashion photographer (played with hauteur by Faye Dunaway) rather than the usual leering male. The photoshoots alternate between pastels and trashy violence – images supplied by photographers Rebecca Blake and Helmut Newton.



1 Funny Face (1956) Stanley Donen's musical provides a stylish showcase for Audrey Hepburn's impish appeal. The plot revolves around the industry's constant search for a fresh face, with Hepburn the latest thing and Fred Astaire the photographer who discovers her. The industry here is in transition – something reflected in the clothes, which are part 1950s prettiness (the mainstream fashion world), part beatnik (Hepburn's world).



3 The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant (1972) Fassbinder's characters always dress well, never more so than in this all-female drama, which unfolds entirely in a stylised apartment. Fassbinder regulars Margit Carstensen, Irm Hermann and Hanna Schygulla play, respectively, a neurotic fashion designer, her assistant and a femme fatale. The film brings the simmering drama of a seductive fashion photo to life, as power struggles and decadent costumes abound.



5 Zoolander (2001) *Zoolander* is the ultimate fashion parody, skewering the fundamental self-absorption of models through Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson's pea-brained peacocks. It could easily be snarky, writing off the entire industry as superficial, but *Zoolander* succeeds in being a subversively loving tribute, with an emphasis on silly lines and knowing celebrity cameos (including one from style god David Bowie).

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IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

Questions of memory and trauma in Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder* proved fertile terrain for the feature debut of visual artist Omer Fast

By Philip Concannon

"Are you an arts person or a film person?" Omer Fast asks as we sit down to discuss *Remainder*. It's easy to understand why this question comes up, as nobody seems entirely sure which of these two worlds his directorial debut feels more at home in. We met at Tate Modern an hour before the world premiere of his film at last year's BFI London Film Festival, where it was screened in the Experimental strand, normally reserved for the most esoteric and niche filmmaking in the programme. *Remainder*, however, is not as inaccessible as that categorisation might make it appear. While the film connects with the themes of memory, storytelling and trauma that Fast's video and installation work has frequently explored, the story of a broken young man (Tom Sturridge) literally rebuilding his memories after suffering a freak accident has been brought to the screen with bracing directorial confidence and a sly sense of humour. *Remainder* has the gripping, propulsive momentum of a classic thriller, and deserves to achieve the same word-of-mouth cult success enjoyed by the Tom McCarthy novel it was adapted from.

Philip Concannon: Did you immediately know you wanted to adapt *Remainder* when you first read it?

Omer Fast: I knew I was interested in the novel. I had no notion at all of making a feature film out of it. When I finished reading the book I was in an airplane and the book finishes in an airplane too, so I had a very nice moment. I won't use the word epiphany, but I was touched. I'd met Tom McCarthy five or so years beforehand and I thought of getting in touch with him to ask about collaborating, just to talk about whether or not there might be a possibility of adapting this. He had known my work so it was an easy contact and I asked him about making an adaptation of some aspect of the book, you know, expanding it or embedding it in a piece. He said, "Oh, it's funny you should say that..." and it turned out there was a whole process moving: rights had been optioned, people had been involved and scripts had been written. So I was brought in to something that was already in motion.

PC: Coming from the world of visual arts, how did you find the filmmaking process?

OF: It's certainly a different process in terms of the more collaborative nature of the enterprise, especially if it's your first film and especially when the budget that's needed to have these set pieces is what it is. There was a definite change in terms of what I was used to. I'm used to the micro-budgets I get to make my pieces. On a day-to-day basis, in terms of shooting and what-not, I don't think it differs dramatically, but it differs as an engagement. I usually get the money and I make the project within six months to eight months tops. This is a slog. It's a big long story that keeps you engaged in various ways and awake at night. It's a long thing.



Memory man: Omer Fast, with headphones, on the set of *Remainder*

PC: The way the main character Tom tries to recreate his memories by hiring actors and directing them so specifically feels like a commentary on the act of filmmaking.

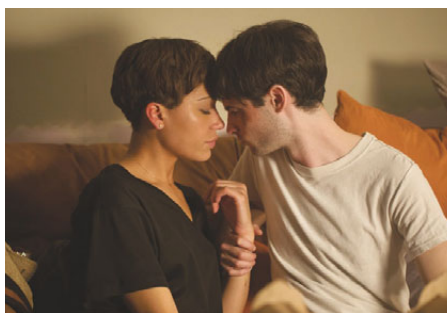
OF: The narrative deals with a man who is making theatre happen, in a sense. He's not making a movie because he's not filming it, and in the book he's quite adamant about keeping cameras out of his whole machinery, but since we were filming it we had the liberty of bringing cameras in and addressing the fact that this is an actor, this is make-believe. He is using the language and the processes of theatre, cinema and acting in order to get at something ineffable, and of course that's what we do. If there weren't that ineffable thing to go for, it would be an obvious thing, it would be a recipe and it would be dull.

PC: In the film you have to create a sense of confusion and disorientation for the viewers while keeping them involved in the narrative.

Was it hard to achieve that balance?

OF: That is a balance, but in the end you're not going to make yourself or anyone else happy if you're going to dwell on making something that

The kind of stories I'm interested in are not necessarily stories that are linear, in which causality is understandable along the way



Cush Jumbo and Tom Sturridge in *Remainder*

is inherently understandable, because how do you get there? You can do focus groups or little screenings and ask people to tell you what they understand, but the kind of stories I'm interested in are not necessarily stories that are linear, in which causality is understandable along the way. I'm working in this twilight – or sunrise – of productive disorientation and that's something I want to hold on to in the stories I tell, and it's very analogous to the state that the protagonist is in. We're talking about someone who has been through a traumatic brain injury and is trying to get to grips with what the present is. He's trying to put together fragments of his past, not knowing that these pieces are coming together to form his present. That conceit along with the structure is the guideline, and it might be confusing to somebody expecting everything to come together after 97 minutes, but that's not what the story is. It's probably disorienting, but in the best way.

PC: *Remainder* is a portrait of a city that is changing rapidly through gentrification. Was that an important aspect of it for you?

OF: Absolutely. My work very often has a basis in, for want of a better phrase, a documentary process, and there is a strong social component to what I do. The story does have it, although trying to thread that in is a very delicate thing because there are a lot of other things happening in the movie. But it was very clear that this is a person who comes from a very different background to the people and places he's engaging with. It's not incidental that this is happening in Brixton [in South London] and Tom McCarthy wrote the book while he was living in Brixton, and we don't talk much about the meaning of university educated people moving with their ideas, stories and fantasies into a particular neighbourhood, and how they perceive it, digest it and more importantly how they change it. I'm not a London native and I have much more experience of New York, but gentrification is obviously a universal thing so we adapted it to the local scenario. **S**

i ***Remainder* is released in UK cinemas on 24 June and is reviewed on page 64**

AMID THE GUNS BELOW



The world at war: the material for the film was shot during the five days leading up to the Somme attack on 1 July 1916 and for several days afterwards

A restoration of the official record of the British army's bloodiest day, *The Battle of the Somme*, is screening to mark the event's centenary

By Lawrence Napper

The Battle of the Somme (1916) is a remarkable film by any standards. It has a claim to be one of the biggest blockbusters in British film history. It is one of the few films to be registered on the UNESCO 'Memory of the World' register. It was considered a document of such importance that when the Imperial War Museum was founded, a film archive – one of the first in the world – was included to preserve the footage. A century later there can be few people who have not seen at least some of its haunting images, so frequently have they been incorporated into television documentaries and schools programmes about the fighting on the Western Front. But this release offers an opportunity to watch the whole of this astonishing film, restored by the Imperial War Museum and, depending on the screening, accompanied either by Laura Rossi's beautiful modern score or by the reconstruction of the musical medley recommended for its original screenings. To see the newly restored film in its entirety

is to witness one of the most extraordinary documents of our cinematic history.

Filming on the Western Front was outlawed at the beginning of the war, and it was only after considerable lobbying from newsreel companies and other members of the film industry that this ban was lifted in late 1915. Even then, only two cameramen were licensed to operate, initially producing short newsreel items that were incorporated into the full supporting programme shown in cinemas at the time. *The Battle of the Somme* represented a major change in direction. The material was shot by Geoffrey Malins and John McDowell during the five days leading up to the attack on 1 July 1916, and for several days afterwards. It was only after the footage was received in London that a feature-length film centring on the battle was conceived. The film that was then assembled is in five broadly chronological sections.

Parts one and two deal with the preparations for the attack. There are numerous scenes showing troop movements – columns of men

To see the newly restored film in its entirety is to witness one of the most extraordinary documents of our cinematic history

marching along roads towards the camera. Their regiments are identified in the intertitles. As they approach the camera, smiling and waving, their faces are clearly identifiable. Throughout *The Battle of the Somme* there is an implicit invitation to audiences to try to recognise loved ones on the screen, creating a potential connection between the troops presented and the audiences at home, which is crucial to the film's power. Evidence suggests that this invitation was enthusiastically taken up at the time, as it has been ever since. When footage from the film was extensively reused in the BBC's 1964 series *The Great War*, the Imperial War Museum received a flurry of letters from viewers claiming to have recognised relations. More recently, painstaking work by historians Alastair Fraser, Andrew Robertshaw and Steve Roberts has identified a host of the officers and men who appear. Recognition of serving men on screen was a familiar element of wartime cinema-going, as the 'Roll of Honour' films (which show photographs of men from a particular local community serving at the front) attest. Examples from Preston and Braintree can be found in the BFI National Archive.

The early section of the film also contains numerous sequences showing the stockpiling of munitions, and the artillery teams at work loading and firing the massive guns as part of the bombardment in the build-up to the attack.

Reflecting on his work later, Malins claimed he had “endeavoured to catch something of the glamour, as well as the awful horror of it all”, and these pictures absolutely demonstrate that excruciating paradox – the guns are awe-inspiring, and the rhythmic co-ordination of the teams who keep them firing has a hypnotic beauty all the more terrifying in the knowledge of the human destruction it serves.

Elsewhere in his memoirs, Malins expresses a confident faith in the power of cinema to convey the truth. In years to come, he predicts, military experts will argue the toss over whether a particular action was appropriate; old soldiers will return from the front and as the years pass their war stories will be retold as mythic fables; “but the kinema film never alters. It does not argue. It depicts.” Military experts certainly have a lot to say about the tactics that led to the devastating loss of life on the first day of the Somme, and there are plenty of veterans’ stories about the experience of battle. But the central section of *The Battle of the Somme*, ‘The Attack’, serves as a foundational text in the debate over cinema’s relationship to the ‘truth’. Two brief shots – less than 20 seconds in total – show men going over the top and walking towards barbed wire; some of them fall and lie still. These images caused a sensation when they were shown in the UK, and most of the reviews and personal accounts refer to these images as the emotional heart of the film. The *Spectator* described the image of “the first life sacrificed in the assault”, going on to say, “It is a wonderful example of how reality – remember this is no arranged piece of play acting but a record taken in the agony of battle – transcends fiction.”

The revelation that these images were not in fact filmed at the front on the first day of the Somme, but were reconstructions made well behind the lines after the attack, has coloured the way the film has been seen since the 1960s, seeming to confirm that film does more than merely depict – it argues a case. This is perhaps unfortunate as it tends to overshadow the fact that the image immediately following these reconstructed ones is only too real – actual film of men going over the top in the attack of 1 July. Filmed from much further away, and looking along the front line rather than from behind it, the image shows a vast expanse of grey rising from the ground. Slowly, tiny figures appear – little specks of black in a grey frame. They move uncertainly from the top right towards the bottom left of the screen. Unlike the faked footage this is unspectacular, difficult to decipher, almost static. But knowing what it depicts makes it difficult not to be moved by the shot.

Later sequences in the central section of the film are equally moving and have rightly become famous. The images of men resting in the sunken road in no man’s land near Beaumont-Hamel, staring at and through the camera as they prepare for the next attack; the ‘trench rescue sequence’ showing a man carrying a wounded comrade back to safety; the images of wounded men coming away from the battle, their haunted, exhausted faces briefly animated for the camera; the images of men matter-of-factly waiting to have their wounds dressed and



Of horses and men: ‘It is above all else the ordinary soldier who is at the heart of this film’

the scenes of captured Germans being escorted away – all confirm historian Nicholas Reeves’s observation that “it is above all else the ordinary soldier who is at the heart of this film. The war was being fought by hundreds of thousands of ordinary working men and this is their film.”

Estimates suggest that up to 20 million people – almost half the population of Britain in 1916 – saw the film in the first six weeks of its release. It was shown even as the battle continued, and audiences at home flocked to see images of the conditions that their sons, brothers and fathers were having to endure. Malins recalled that in filming he “always tried to remember that it was through the eyes of the camera, directed by my sense of observation, that millions of people at home would gain their only firsthand knowledge of what was happening on the front”.

The reactions of numerous reviewers and diarists bear this out. It was the film’s perceived realism – its authenticity – that was most commented upon. It offered a connection to the men fighting that audiences at home craved and

valued. While it was undoubtedly propaganda, it offered none of the crude stereotypes and atrocity accusations which we associate with the more extreme versions of that form. Nobody could claim that it glorifies war – indeed one of the repeated themes of the reviews is that the film reveals the ‘truth’ of war, through the connection it offered to the ordinary soldier, but also through the images it offered of death itself.

Towards the end of the film there is an extended sequence showing the dead – it’s an astonishing sequence which it is difficult to imagine appearing in modern television coverage of wars in which Britons are fighting. Close-ups of corpses slumped in trenches or lined up for burial. A horse-drawn artillery limber casually swerves to avoid a corpse in some long grass. These sequences caused some controversy on the home front, and letters in various newspapers debated the ethics of showing images of the dead to audiences who might be recently bereaved.

Nevertheless, the majority of correspondents offered opinions which chimed with perhaps the most famous verdict on the film – that of Lloyd George’s secretary, Frances Stevenson, who had recently lost her brother Paul to the conflict, and who recorded her reaction to the film in her diary: “There were pictures... of the battlefield after the fight and of our gallant men lying all crumpled up and helpless. There were pictures of men mortally wounded being carried out of the communication trenches, with the look of agony on their faces. It reminded me of what Paul’s last hours were: I have often tried to imagine myself what he went through, but now I know, and I shall never forget. It was like going through a tragedy. I felt something of what the Greeks must have felt when they went in their crowds to witness those grand old plays – to be purged in their minds through pity and terror.”



The Battle of the Somme is rereleased in UK cinemas on 1 July and screens at BFI Southbank, London, as part of ‘The View from the Ground: World War I on Film’, which runs from July to September



Cameraman John McDowell

CONCERNING VIOLENCE

When it comes to showing violence on screen, particularly if it's based on real events, filmmakers face a tricky ethical dilemma



By Mark Cousins

In 1998, *Resurrection Man*, a British film inspired by the murder of 23 civilians in Belfast between 1975-82 by the Loyalist gang the

Shankill Butchers, was released. I hated it. In April, in an article in the *Guardian* about the portrayal of Belfast in movies, I blasted the film, and called it 'Hollywood'. People involved with the film emailed me to object to my derision. As I hadn't seen the movie for nearly 20 years, I ordered the DVD. It came this morning, and so I'll watch it now. Our tastes in films change. I used to love Jean Cocteau's *Les Enfants terribles*, but now I find it boastful. What was it that made me recoil from *Resurrection Man*? Would it still do so?

*

I've just watched the film, and am happy to admit that I was very wrong to call it Hollywood. Most of the key personnel in the movie come from, or know a lot about, Northern Ireland. There are some great things in the film – the shooting and scoring in particular, and the marshalling of talented actors. *Resurrection Man* also goes some way to analyse the psychology of its main killer, Victor. In one spot-on moment, his mentor looks him – and us – in the face and says, "I know your dreams: class, comfort and power." In a striking later scene, Victor snorts cocaine, 'Jerusalem' plays, that same mentor wears a Nazi cap, and he and Victor have a homoerotic exchange: eerie echoes of Visconti or even Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1973).

My mind raced as I watched, zig-zagging between the world of the real city of the 1970s and its 1990s filmic recreation. I was ten when the Butchers abducted those men and sliced them with knives and, sometimes, axes. I remember the whispered stories about them, as if they were myths. One rumour that found its way into my childhood imagination was that, once the people were killed, their eyes were removed and rosary beads were threaded through the empty sockets. This was the era of *The Exorcist* (1973); such stories were demonic, Old Testament, like horror cinema.

From the beginning, *Resurrection Man* is interested in such a cinematic or mythic dimension to its killers. At the start we see young Victor watch James Cagney in a scene from *The Public Enemy* (1931), as he – Victor – hears sectarian talk about Catholics. Later, Victor's moll tells him that he's seen too many movies. In another key scene, the mentor says to him, "Grow in the public mind: Victor Kelly, the man and the myth." At times, Verdi plays. Stuart Townsend, who plays Victor ably, swaggers like Liam Gallagher, handsome and confident. *Mean Streets* (1973) and *GoodFellas* (1990) also come to mind.

This is what troubled me about *Resurrection Man*. Its style and generic qualities – its thriller elements – raise the question of what kind of



'Resurrection Man' is engaged by its killer's force field, and so finds no time to look at the void left by the victims' appalling deaths

world its violence is taking place in. This is the Tarantino problem. As his movies have become more postmodern, often feeling as if they are taking place within other movies, his violence has if anything become more explicit. The defence of this is that it is comic book and cathartic. I buy that to a large extent. Through its control of tone, and the degree of consequence shown as a result of its violence, a film tells us to what extent its world is mythic, comic, metaphysical (Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar*, 1966), gothic (the *Saw* films, 2004-), social, sexual (*Irreversible*, 2002) or psychological. The film will achieve escape velocity from its violence if it has framed its story in a way that doesn't focus us on the suffering that violence – in another movie universe – would cause.

Resurrection Man takes an already somewhat mythologised story – the media reporting of the Shankill Butchers' spree had elements of the literary macabre and the whodunit genre – and gives the myth-wheel another spin. For me it raises the question of whether some violent films can be too cinematic. Would the approach of Elem Klimov in *Come and See* (1985) or of the Dardenne brothers not have reaped more rewards? Add to this the fact that

the film's killings were clearly directly inspired by the deaths of real people, and I get twitchy. When I interviewed Janet Leigh, I asked her whether she was worried that the jumping off point for *Psycho* (1960) was the real murders of Ed Gein. She answered no, because the film was clearly entertainment. Leigh was smart, and wrote a very good book, *Psycho: Behind the Scenes of the Classic Thriller* (1995). One of the reasons Alfred Hitchcock's film gets away with its borrowing is its brilliant construction. Famously, in its first third we are very much in the mind of, and of the point of view of, the person who will become its first victim. After her death, we see little grieving for Leigh's murdered Marion Crane, but the film seems to get its grieving in before she dies, by spending so much – often leisurely – time with her.

As a film like *Resurrection Man*'s world is mythic-erotic, it is engaged by its killer's force field, his sociopathy, and finds no time to look at the void left by the victims' appalling deaths. This is the dilemma Cavani faced in *The Night Porter* – why focus on the erotic imaginations of the Nazi and his victim, which seems so secondary to the psychic world of the gas chambers? In my opinion, Cavani just about managed to address that question. Other films back the wrong horse. The real and the past sit next to those films that are inspired by them, saying nothing. But when the real is horrifying, its moral authority can make it seem as if filmmakers, to switch metaphors, are fiddling while Rome burns. ☹



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LIONSGATE

DEVELOPMENT TALE

GHOSTBUSTERS



Who ya gonna call? New girls on the block **Melissa McCarthy, Kate McKinnon, Kristen Wiig and Leslie Jones**

Putting together a remake of a beloved and highly commercial comedy shouldn't be too much of a problem, right? Wrong

By Charles Gant

In June 1984, a little-heralded Columbia Pictures comedy appeared, in which Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis played parapsychologists who are dismissed from their university posts and reinvent themselves as the ghost-vanquishing go-to guys of New York City. *Ghostbusters* spent five weeks at the top of the US box office, returning to the chart summit twice again that summer, and ended up the highest-grossing comedy of the 1980s. *Ghostbusters II*, five years later, may not have enjoyed the same acclaim as the original film, from critics or audiences, but a global box office of \$215 million was judged at the time not so shabby. The same year, the consumer electronics giant Sony acquired Columbia for \$3.4 billion.

Making a third film proved less easy. The original contracts with the cast of *Ghostbusters* did not include any clauses about sequels. When negotiations for *Ghostbusters II* came around, Columbia ceded an extraordinary degree of control to the producer-director Ivan Reitman and the star trio: in return for their participation in the sequel, it was agreed that no further *Ghostbusters* films could proceed without their unanimous approval. "It was a wonderful time

to be in the movie business," Reitman reflects today. "It put a lot of weight into the creatives' hands." The consequence was that not only could any of the quartet opt not to participate in a third film — they could block the other three from making one. "We were all partners working together," says Reitman, "but we didn't really have a partnership agreement where we had an arrangement to solve any difference of opinion."

The chief stumbling-block was Murray, who played lead character Dr Peter Venkman. Not a fan of the second film, he was disinclined to make a third. Aykroyd and Ramis, the writers, felt differently; one of their ideas transposed the action to an alternative version of Manhattan called Manhelton, and is remembered variously under the titles *Hellbent* and *Ghostbusters Goes to Hell*.

Momentum built again towards the end of the last decade, with a story in which the original *Ghostbusters* hand over to a generation of younger characters. Gene Stupnitsky and Lee Eisenberg, the screenwriting duo with whom Ramis wrote Biblical comedy *Year One* (2009), were drafted in to work on new versions of this idea. According to Reitman, "Bill said that he would do one scene, and as long as he died everything else would be fine. We didn't really know if he was serious or not, but we killed him off in the very first scene, and created a ghost of Venkman who plays a continuous character in the film. We figured, that would only be voiceover work for Bill and would be much easier to do. The idea was that we would take

Oscar, the son of Sigourney Weaver's character Dana, and now a college student, and have him be warned by the ghost of Bill, protecting him."

But the stumbling-block remained. "Bill just refused to read that draft of the script," says Reitman. "I think he saw *Year One* on television one day and really didn't like it. And he felt that the writers were no good and didn't want to read anything else by them. We were basically dead in the water, even on that very limited usage [of Bill]. Danny, Harold and I were very happy with it and the studio loved the draft, and technically greenlit it with me directing it. I tried for about a year to get Bill to read it, and he wouldn't. I think he finally read the first scene in which he dies, and decided he wasn't going to do it. And if that wasn't enough, Harold got sick and was basically confined to his home for a couple of years, before he passed away. That's when I felt, well, the writing's definitely on the wall here. I'm going to take this as a divine sign. It just took all my energy for directing another version of the film away from me."

Ramis died in February 2014, but by then Reitman's efforts were already going in another direction: if there would be no new *Ghostbusters* movie with the original actors, could there be one

Having initially turned down the project, Paul Feig had a new idea: would Sony be interested in a reboot with funny actresses?

without them? He explains, “I thought, somebody should take a shot at this fresh. So I concentrated on representing my partners in terms of earning something on all future Ghostbusters movies if we would relinquish our controls. It was a considerable miracle that Danny and I were able to work out an arrangement that freed the studio into making the movies that they wanted.”

With Reitman no longer in the frame to direct, Sony turned to Phil Lord and Chris Miller, with whom they already had a flourishing relationship on two franchises: *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* and *Jump Street*. The studio also tried Ruben Fleischer, whose 2009 comedy *Zombieland* had featured a memorable Bill Murray cameo. Traction was finally achieved with *Bridesmaids* director Paul Feig, who had originally passed on an opportunity to direct the latest Stupnitsky-Eisenberg script, explaining, “I’m always leery of reunion shows. I prefer an origins story.”

Having turned down the project, Feig had a new idea in July 2014: would Sony be interested in a *Ghostbusters* reboot featuring some of the funny actresses with whom he already had a working relationship? Since it soon became apparent that this approach would likely reunite *Bridesmaids* stars Melissa McCarthy and Kristen Wiig, Sony grabbed at the opportunity. Studio boss Amy Pascal may also have seen the virtue of flipping the gender, since male actors would surely have been wary of taking on roles that would be directly compared – probably unflatteringly – to the originals. Katie Dippold, who wrote *The Heat* (2013) for Feig, now joined him as co-screenwriter, and the pair quickly delivered a draft.

Although Reitman remains as the film’s producer, he’s candid about his own initial qualms. “Paul always had in his head creating it as if the first one didn’t exist, which was something I disagreed with. I said to the studio, ‘I think that’s a mistake.’ The movie did exist and was extraordinarily popular, and I don’t quite understand how this lives together. Especially because it’s going to make use of all the iconography that we invented for the first couple of movies. But Paul’s a really good director and he had these great actresses. And we basically all finally decided that that’s what we would do, despite my reservations. He wrote a very funny script with Katie.”

As *Ghostbusters* raced towards its June 2015 start date, Sony was rocked by the hacking of its computer servers, as a result of which Pascal stepped down in February that year. She transitioned into a producer deal that saw her join Reitman at the helm of the film.

“She had a longer relationship with Paul,” explains Reitman. “I didn’t know him. I’d met him a few times. She was keen to continue. She had done a great job as chairman of the studio, and the studio wanted to make her landing as comfortable as possible. I was the only producer on *Ghostbusters*, both the first and the second. My arrangement is I control whoever is going to be producer on the film, from here on in, at least through my lifetime. They asked for my permission, which I granted.” ☺

i **Ghostbusters opens in UK cinemas on 15 July and will be reviewed next month**

THE NUMBERS MUSTANG

By Charles Gant

When Curzon Artificial Eye opened Turkish arthouse title *Mustang* in the middle of May, debut takings of £57,000 from 43 cinemas were hardly cause for wild celebration. True, there had been a fair amount of sunshine that weekend, which didn’t help, and *Mustang* also faced rivals in the form of Richard Linklater’s *Everybody Wants Some!!* and Jeremy Saulnier’s *Green Room* – two very different propositions, but critically admired ones that were competing for attention for press and arthouse audiences. Comments Curzon’s head of theatrical Jon Rushton, “We felt there was space for all of it, but certainly if you were motivated primarily by the critics, you had a lot of choice that opening weekend.”

Mustang’s fortunes immediately improved, with a very strong midweek performance, earning £52,000 over the Monday to Thursday period that first week. The second weekend, despite only a tiny increase in venues to 45, the film held on strongly, with box office of £56,000 – a negligible drop of two per cent from the opening. By comparison, *Everybody Wants Some!!* fell 47 per cent. At press time, after 11 days of play, *Mustang* stood at £181,000, putting it well on course to become the highest-grossing Turkish film ever at the UK box office (see chart below).

Curzon bought *Mustang*, the feature directing debut of Deniz Gamze Ergüven, at Cannes last year, where it played in Directors’ Fortnight. “We liked it and we took a chance on it,” says Rushton. “At that point we didn’t imagine it was going to be nominated for an Oscar.”

As it turned out, although *Mustang* did not win the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar – it lost to another Curzon-distributed title, *Son of Saul* – the nomination did prove helpful in providing a press hook. “There has been a really low number of female directors who have been nominated for this particular Oscar category,” says Rushton, “so that seemed to really help. People found that as a way in. Also,



Dark horse: Deniz Gamze Ergüven’s *Mustang*

Deniz is super cool and glamorous. We probably got as much director-based press coverage on *Mustang* as we have on most of our films.”

While the weather was, in Rushton’s words, “a little more amenable to cinemagoing” on *Mustang*’s second weekend of play, it has been playing havoc with release campaigns throughout May. It certainly played a factor in *Son of Saul*’s calamitous drop of 64 per cent in its second session – highly unusual for a critically acclaimed Curzon title – and also for the surprisingly soft opening for *Florence Foster Jenkins*.

“We spend a surprising amount of time talking about weather,” says Rushton, “and our take on it is that if it’s either early or very late in the summer, it can really impact you. If it’s that first burst of sunshine of the year, then that can be quite a heavy challenge. Or if it’s getting right towards the end of the summer – it happened to us on [Lars von Trier’s 2011 film] *Melancholia* – people think it’s going to be the last sunny weekend of the season, and that can really hit you. It’s that fear of missing out.” ☺

TURKISH FILMS AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Once upon a Time in Anatolia	2012	£277,447
Recep Ivedik 2	2009	£210,362
Mustang	2016	£180,871*
Recep Ivedik 4	2014	£161,310
Uzak	2004	£156,181
Climates	2007	£148,313
Vizontele Tuuba	2004	£140,422
Winter Sleep	2014	£108,679
G.O.R.A.	2004	£98,687
Hükümet Kadın 2	2013	£94,034

*gross at press time

CANNES

HALL OF MIRRORS

The international critics on the Croisette might not have seen eye to eye with the jury in the choices of films most deserving of awards recognition this year, but very few would argue that this was anything other than a bumper year at the festival, with a generous handful of truly standout films. **By Nick James**

Let's suppose that cinema is having a minor identity crisis, that the 'seventh art' has now lost status to a degree that it feels less the grand synthesiser of all the other artforms and more the convenient carriage medium. This is not much of a stretch when 1) theatre, opera and ballet performances on the big screen outperform 'art' films; 2) the aesthetic of the promotional video is so dominant in cinema; and 3) narrative screen storytelling is dominated by television drama series. If these premises have any truth, the public dispute between the jury and the critics at Cannes 2016 is understandable. It's about the loss of a shared faith. This year's unusually vivid programme can be seen as a hall of mirrors, showing us the contortions the cinema medium is putting itself through to stay relevant.

We can ask, for instance, what made the critics' favourite film **Toni Erdmann** diminish in the jury mirror, yet seem so huge to the press one; conversely, why the jury thought Xavier Dolan's **It's Only the End of the World** was worth the Grand Prix when most journalists thought it grotesquely histrionic and precious. Of course, it's primarily a matter of what you look for. Maren Ade's winning daughter-father comedy **Toni Erdmann** contains some of the sharpest moments of audience blindsiding I've ever encountered and the press screening was noisily appreciative to an unprecedented level. All this for a film whose premise is unpromising. Following the death of his pet dog, Winfried Conradi (Peter Simonischek), a retired man fond of practical jokes, decides to visit his workaholic daughter Ines (Sandra Hüller) in Bucharest, to bring a little chaos into her too well-ordered life. He adopts a new, entrepreneurial persona: 'Toni Erdmann'. Ade's structural panache and nose for a perfect take (I hear she shot 500 hours of material) are matched by the actors' comic timing. So what was lacking for George Miller and his fellow jurors? Comparing it with the Dolan – which they clearly loved – you'd have to conclude **Erdmann's** deadpan, subtle performances and unshowily naturalistic look weren't 'big' enough, the director's amiably askew view of the everyday not important enough for a prize.

What distinguishes *It's Only the End of the World* – an adaptation of a 1990 play by Jean-Luc Lagarce about a young man returning to his demanding family to announce his impending death – is its starry cast list, its reliance on close-ups and its near-hysterical turns. But seeing Marion Cotillard, Vincent Cassel, Nathalie Baye and Léa Seydoux let rip at the protagonist without knowing why they're so angry and frustrated is alienating, especially when their faces are projected so large all the time. Quiet contrast is provided by the martyr-like lead Gaspard Ulliel, who glowers and recedes under their obsessive attention – he

may already be a ghost. Tropes recognisable from Dolan's other films – a 'monstrous other' mother (Baye), a homoerotic relationship bordering on violence with a brother (Cassel) – make it feel wearisomely familiar. Could it be its essentially theatrical nature that appealed to the jury?

There was less disagreement about the Palme d'Or winner: Ken Loach's **I, Daniel Blake** is based as far away from the lotus-eating aspect of Cannes as you can get – it's a portal into real-life misery caused by systemic cruelty. The film derives its power from understatement, largely thanks to non-professional actor Dave Johns in the title role. Anyone who has seen Loach's work will find nothing radically new in this tale of people on the poverty line in Newcastle, except that he refrains from underlining his points. Katie (Hayley Squires) is a young single mum with two kids to feed, forcibly moved from the south; Daniel Blake is an elderly carpenter, recovering from a heart attack and expected to look for work he can't do. What blindsides you here is grief for what has been allowed to happen to Britain's welfare state, our nasty, failure-encouraging computer-automated benefits system.

The snubbing of **Toni Erdmann** looks like even more of a Cannes own-goal when you think how a female director winning the Palme would have enhanced the festival's image; but at least Andrea Arnold won the Jury prize, for the third time. Her gorgeous, heartfelt, singalong road movie **American Honey** is about a hopeful bunch of bespangled and tattooed youngsters recruited to sell magazine subscriptions across America. The focus is on the company's newest pick-up Star (newcomer Sasha Lane), with whom the camera is in love, and chief recruiter Jake (Shia LaBeouf), who moves in and out of scenes explosively and elusively, as if he might vanish at any moment. Star learns about sales techniques, the dangers of Texan barbecues and the joy of not being tied down. The film moves from one random heightened moment to the next, packed with lustrous images and tantalising unresolved themes; but it also harbours sympathy for these youthful dreamers, whose future may not be so bright in the long run.

CANNES TOP TEN NICK JAMES

1. **Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade
2. **Paterson** Jim Jarmusch
3. **I, Daniel Blake** (below) Ken Loach
4. **Personal Shopper** Olivier Assayas
5. **Graduation** Cristian Mungiu
6. **Sieranevada** Cristi Puiu
7. **American Honey** Andrea Arnold
8. **Divines** Houda Benyahmina
9. **The Unknown Girl**
Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne
10. **Aquarius** Kleber Mendonça Filho





24 hour party people: Andrea Arnold's *American Honey*, which follows the exploits of a group of young magazine sellers in the US, won the Jury Prize

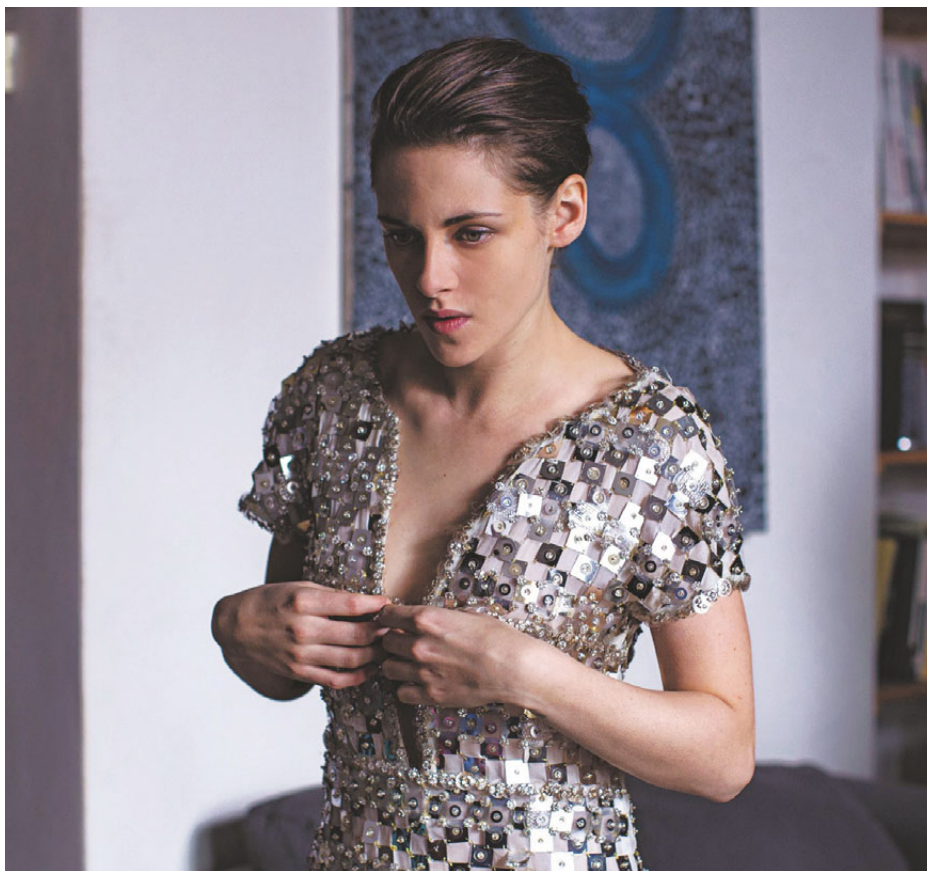
Nicole Garcia's **From the Land of the Moon** is of a different, lesser order, but has the virtue of an elegant classical shot structure. Gabrielle (Cotillard again, much better here) is a farm-raised schoolgirl growing up after World War II who develops a powerful literary-sexual obsession with a teacher and is given to exposing her naked silhouette at her bedroom window. To avoid scandal, her mother marries her off to José (Alex Brendemühl), a Spanish civil war refugee, setting him up in business. Gabrielle agrees on the basis of no sex – she is waiting for a love like the affair she wanted with her teacher, which she finds when she's sent to a spa to treat her kidney stones and meets a lieutenant dying from wounds received in Indo-China – played by Louis Garrel at his most languid and wilting. It's melodrama of the purest purple, executed with class and conviction; but its cheesy pleasures are eventually spoiled by a ridiculous plot twist.

Another 'women's picture' that didn't quite come off was Pedro Almodóvar's **Julieta**. It was hard to put one's finger on what went wrong: the director has seamlessly sewn together three Alice Munro short stories – 'Chance', 'Soon' and 'Silence'. The film takes our heroine Julieta (Emma Suárez) through a chance meeting that takes her back into her past as a spiky-haired punkette (here played by Adriana Ugarte) to discover why her daughter abandoned her. But the storytelling seems passionless and academic; perhaps the sadness of its themes of loss drained it of Almodóvar's usual energy.

One of the most contentious decisions was the Best Actress award – the problem being that there were too many impressive female performances to choose from: Sandra Hüller's in *Toni Erdmann* for a start, and Isabelle Huppert's in Paul Verhoeven's excellent *Elle*. The winner, Jaclyn Jose, is very fine as the central figure in Brillante Mendoza's long night's journey into Metro Manila police corruption **Ma' Rosa** – a sodium-lit vision of hell on earth. The most obviously ignored performance, however, was by Sonia Braga, whose career goes back to *Dona Flor and her Two Husbands* (1976) and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985): she is quite resplendent in Kleber Mendonça Filho's **Aquarius**, playing a retired bohemian muso trying to hold on to her lovely apartment in Recife, Brazil, when all the building's other tenants have sold out to a developer. As she tackles each sneaky corporate move, she's the epitome of indomitable ageing grace and hauteur,



Nicole Garcia's *From the Land of the Moon*



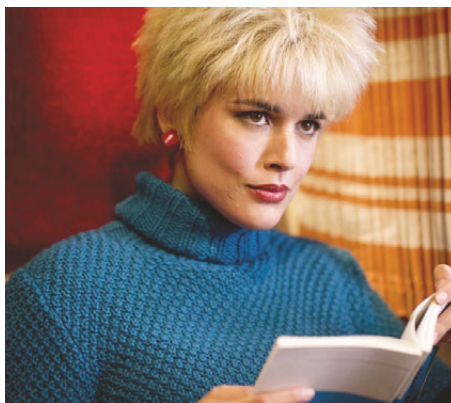
Olivier Assayas's *Personal Shopper*

and Filho brings the appreciation for urban atmospheres he showed in *Neighbouring Sounds*.

The woman whose image dominated Cannes was, of course, Kristen Stewart – her reputation as the most watchable young actor around only enhanced by standout appearances in Woody Allen's opening night film **Café Society**, and Olivier Assayas's **Personal Shopper**. All of Allen's longstanding tropes can be found in his ballad of thwarted romance, which sets New York against Hollywood in a creamy romantic

vision of the 1930s. Stewart is particularly dazzling, playing a nascent bobby-soxer working as PA to big Hollywood producer Phil (Steve Carell). She's assigned to look after Bobby, Phil's nephew from Brooklyn (the usual Allen avatar, here played by Jesse Eisenberg): they hang out in funky dive bars and he falls for her; but she's having an affair with a married man. The ensuing on-off romantic saga would have been more enjoyable without Allen's explanatory voiceover between and over every scene, stopping us ever coming to our own conclusions.

By contrast, Olivier Assayas likes to fling us through a film in quick-sketch scenes, wrong-footing us along the way. So in *Personal Shopper* – for which he shared the Best Director prize – we don't start with dissatisfied youth Maureen (Stewart) visiting boutiques for a celebrity she



Pedro Almodóvar's *Julieta*



Xavier Dolan's *It's Only the End of the World*

rarely sees, but with her professing that she is a spiritualist medium. Maureen made a pact with her recently deceased brother Lewis – after he died, he would show her a sign. And things do indeed go bump for her one night in the family house that she is trying to pass on to friends. A second night produces a wispy manifestation that somehow satisfies her, but then her life starts to go awry. While dropping off clothes and jewellery cases for Kyra, her superstar bitch of an employer, she meets Kyra's lover, Ingo (a chillingly low-key Lars Eidinger), who questions her closely while he waits for Kyra to finish a Skype interview in her bedroom – he's just been dumped, he tells Maureen, and wants to persuade Kyra to change her mind. Meanwhile, the ectoplasmic mist drifts around after her. Stewart here is an enigmatic, warily frayed yet unafraid presence, almost as if she'd be happy to step over to the other side at any moment – magnetically watchable no matter what she does, even bobbing about Parisian traffic helmeted on a scooter at night with garment bags hanging off her. Assayas's approach to the manifestations is pleasingly straightforward, using the corniest methods, and the screenplay's handling of taunting text messages between Maureen and a mystery figure is a masterpiece of tension building.

Assayas's ghosts ask to be taken at face value, as integral genre elements, and you're happy to go along with him – whereas the supposedly realist actions in Alain Guiraudie's **Staying Vertical** strain plausibility. The plot is sketchy – a blocked screenwriter gets hopelessly entangled in baroque rural sexual situations – and the way each scene arrives leaves you suspecting that Guiraudie (whose *Stranger by the Lake* was so powerful) was rather desperate for ideas while writing this.

Though more deliberately outlandish and very inventive, Bruno Dumont's bizarre pastiche of costume mysteries **Slack Bay** (*Ma Loute*) also had tonal problems. The oddball slapstick he achieved so sharply in *P'tit Quinquin*, his recent TV series, is here hijacked by actors outhammering each other. It's 1910 on the Pas de Calais coast, the sinister Bruforts combine mussel gathering with ferrying well-off visitors across the river inlet. But, as two black-suited, bowler-hatted policemen Machin and Malfoy tell us, foul play is afoot amid the dunes. Tourists have gone missing, and the Ms must solve the mystery. Machin is enormously fat – his limbs creak, he rolls rather than walks down dunes, and whenever



Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann*

he gets down to examine a clue he can't get up again; these gags soon get wearisome. The film, seething with contempt for TV costume drama, becomes unbearable when we meet the Van Peteghems, rich, inbred aesthetes who visit every summer: hunchbacked, omni-incompetent André (Fabrice Luchini) and his shrieking wife Isabelle (Valéria Bruni-Tedeschi) – who clams up once André's sister Aude (Juliette Binoche) turns up. Luchini remains just bearable but otherwise these extremely broad performances grate.

The oddball slapstick achieved so sharply in 'P'tit Quinquin', is hijacked in 'Slack Bay' by actors outhammering each other

If you're a Cannes veteran and you watch Cristian Mungiu's excellent **Graduation** (the other Best Director winner) – about a grey-haired doctor called Romeo Aldea (Adrian Titieni) – you find a string of familiar elements. Someone throws a rock through Romeo's apartment window, his teenage daughter is grabbed and assaulted not far from her school, then he runs over a dog by accident. The first incident is how Abbas Kiarostami ended *Like Someone in Love*, the second echoes the situation in Michael Haneke's *Hidden*, and the third is how Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman* began. What we might conclude from that is 1) Romeo is dallying with a woman he shouldn't; 2) we may never find out who the assailant is; and 3) his mind is all over the place.

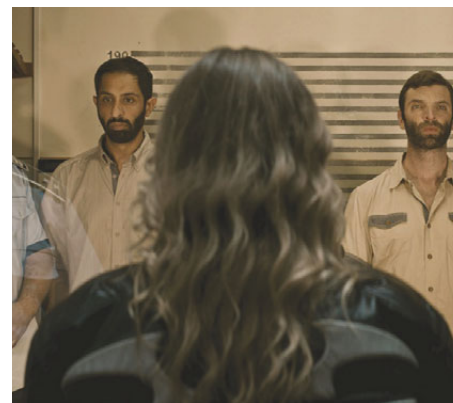
But I'm not saying *Graduation* is in any way derivative – rather, that the worlds



Alain Guiraudie's *Staying Vertical*



Bruno Dumont's *Slack Bay*



Cristian Mungiu's *Graduation*

the festival's favourite directors create can form a pervasive unity. *Graduation* is a beautifully crafted piece of storytelling, which resonates long after you've seen it. Eliza (Maria Dragus), Romeo's daughter, is due to take her final school exams, with the prospect of a scholarship to Oxford, but the day before they start she is assaulted, and her writing arm sprained. After her first paper goes badly, Romeo must consider making the kind of phone calls that contradict the belief in honesty he and his wife Magda (Lia Bugnar) have passed on to Eliza. Amping up the intrigue are Romeo's lover Sandra (Malina Manovic), a schoolteacher and single mum; a convict on the loose; Eliza's motorbike-riding boyfriend; a local mayor who owes Romeo a favour; a pragmatic policeman friend and other investigators. Even if it is from Cannes central, it's a richly crafted, satisfying experience. In some ways the other Romanian film in Competition, Cristi Puiu's *Sieranevada*, is the purer, more complex feat. A mordant farce about a family memorial meal that never gets to the eating, it's a masterpiece of choreography in tight spaces, following the ebb and flow of tension, argument and revelation among the members of a large family group. In terms of its *Short Cuts*-style management of multiple story threads, *Sieranevada* out-Altman Altman – largely without leaving its predominant set. The actors mostly convince, the camerawork is spot-on, the script a dream. So I can't explain why I didn't find it as resonant or satisfying as *Graduation*, other than by saying that a climactic confessional scene between the dead man's eldest son and his wife came out of nowhere and failed to engage me.

Cannes regulars the Dardennes brothers screened one of their quieter offerings, *The Unknown Girl*. The film takes the structure of a detective story but underplays the drama: their protagonist Jenny Davin (Adèle Haenel) is an ordinary young doctor driven by guilt because she didn't answer her door buzzer to a woman who was subsequently murdered. The film is as well-crafted as any, but set in a dour context compared with *The Kid with Bike* (2011) or *Two Days, One Night* (2014). Jenny's struggle is that of the lonely embarrassed investigator – a sort of female Wallander. Haenel plays her as stubborn and commanding but reticent and mortified by mistakes. It felt underpowered both conceptually and as an experience.

Asghar Farhadi's *The Salesman* was another



Cristi Puiu's *Sieranevada*

jury-honoured film that failed to wow many critics. It won the Best Screenplay prize and Best Actor for Shahab Hosseini. According to people I know who've read it, the screenplay is indeed very impressive; the film itself, however, felt unwieldy. It begins with an apartment building being evacuated on safety grounds, leaving husband-and-wife actors Emad (Hosseini) and Rana (Taraneh Alidoosti) – who are acting in a production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* – homeless. They're lent an apartment, but Rana, buzzing in someone she assumes is her husband, is assaulted in the bathroom; they discover the former tenant is a prostitute. The early scenes have the tense naturalism that distinguished Farhadi's *A Separation*; but as the husband's investigation into the likely assailant progresses, the performances become more like those they're giving on stage, and the final scenes have a clunky quality that undermines the tragic consequences of Emad's vengeful fury.

But enough of disappointments: let me turn to *Elle*. Trust Paul Verhoeven to venture where most directors wouldn't dare: a psychological rape-revenge fantasy thriller with jump-out-your-skin attack moments orchestrated to a pounding score, and laced with comedy throughout. What should be problematic is here more complicated and intelligent than it first appears: rape is never

Trust Paul Verhoeven to venture where most directors wouldn't dare: a rape-revenge fantasy thriller that's laced with comedy

a joke and Michèle LeBlanc (Isabelle Huppert), the woman in question, never a victim. As a rich businesswoman with a traumatic past, Huppert carries the film and unites what should be incompatible elements, enabling the film to weather some outrageous plot.

And then there's Jim Jarmusch's droll and lovely *Paterson*. Paterson (Adam Driver) is a bus driver who happens to write poems; his wife Laura (Golshifteh Farahani) is into monochrome home decoration. They live in Paterson, New Jersey, a city that inspired William Carlos Williams to write an epic poem. Jarmusch's taste for ordinary vibrant things – such as a perfect box of matches – is here the launchpad for a diary film that captures a week in the life of our couple. We see the town drifting past the bus's windows. We see the limpid poems (beautifully read by Driver) appear word by word on screen. They're in the same vein as Williams's famous imagist poem 'This Is Just to Say', about eating delicious plums left by his wife in the icebox, but leaner still – the poetry of the everyday. It's an exquisitely modest, heartfelt film with a quietly moving way with gags – pure Jarmusch, yet reminiscent too of Aki Kaurismäki's tributes to working stiffs, such as *Shadows in Paradise* (1986). If there's more than a hint of manic pixie dream girl about Laura, it's offset by her growling English bulldog Marvin, to whom Paterson is just as much married.

Jarmusch was also responsible for another Cannes pleasure, *Gimme Danger*, a documentary about The Stooges – for him, "The greatest rock 'n' roll band in the world". Iggy Pop comes across here as a more thoughtful individual than I would have given him credit for (even though he is an idol of mine). Evocative and revelatory, *Gimme Danger* has all the virtues of the best rock docs, but with a little more humour than most.

Cannes's hall of mirrors shows off the current arthouse postures, but they mostly reflect back on the festival's own history – the filmmakers it has supported and nurtured over the years and the worlds they create. In terms of new visions, progress is slow and usually at the cost of controversy, as the row over *Toni Erdmann* shows. Similarly, the most meticulously gorgeous film in visual terms was undoubtedly Nicolas Winding Refn's *The Neon Demon*, and yet it was generally badly received. You can read about it elsewhere in this issue (see page 26). It has all the content of a children's picture book but is strictly for adults. Is that the future of cinema? ☹



The Dardennes' *The Unknown Girl*



Paul Verhoeven's *Elle*



Jim Jarmusch's *Paterson*



They drive by night: Houda Benyamina's *Divines* drops in on the Parisian lives of Dounia (Oulaya Amamra, left) and Maimouna (Déborah Lukumuena, right)

Away from the main Competition, the festival sidebars proved a rich hunting ground for talent, with a number of promising debuts

By Isabel Stevens

The many sidebars at Cannes, running in parallel with the hallowed Competition, have long been known as incubators of emerging filmmaking talent. However, with so much on at the same time and short descriptions of films or occasional rumours of greatness providing the only guide, scoping out discoveries in Un Certain Regard, Directors' Fortnight and Critics' Week can be hit and miss. This year the sidebars proved a rich hunting ground. The good news for cinema is that many of the most interesting films were debuts, and some of the best were by female directors.

It was a notable year for animation, an area of filmmaking the Competition has often overlooked and which has often been relegated to special screenings or (as in the case of Isao Takahata's swansong *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* in 2014) left to surface in Directors' Fortnight. Festival director Thierry Frémaux, introducing Studio Ghibli's first non-Japanese co-production *The Red Turtle* made some dubious claims about Cannes' long tradition with animation. The truth as far as the recent Competition goes: 2004 was a bumper year, with *Shrek 2* and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*; *Persepolis* competed for the Palme in 2007 and *Waltz with*

CANNES TOP TEN ISABEL STEVENS

1. **Toni Erdmann** Maren Ade
2. **Paterson** Jim Jarmusch
3. **The Red Turtle** Michaël Dudok de Wit
4. **Elle** Paul Verhoeven
5. **Divines** Houda Benyamina
6. **Mimosas** Oliver Laxe
7. **My Life as a Courgette** (below) Claude Barras
8. **Wolf and Sheep** Shahrbanoo Sadat
9. **Aquarius** Kleber Mendonça Filho
10. **Risk** Laura Poitras



Bashir in 2008, but there has been nothing since. *The Red Turtle*, Michaël Dudok de Wit's debut feature after almost 40 years making shorts and commercials, was in Un Certain Regard where it won the Special Prize. I felt it deserved a Competition berth (See feature, page 35).

A complete animation surprise this year was Claude Barras's melancholy stop-motion debut, *My Life as a Courgette*, co-written with *Girlhood* director Céline Sciamma. This saga of abandonment and abuse, seen through the eyes of a nine-year-old boy, is saved from bleakness by a clay protagonist with big eyes and a balloon-like head balancing on a spindly body, combined with Barras's quest to find humour and smudges of happiness in the most unlikely of places. 'Courgette' is the pet name Icare's recently deceased alcoholic mother bestowed on him, which he clings to as the new boy in an orphanage. Barras's bittersweet adaptation of Gilles Paris's novel *Autobiographie d'une Courgette* expertly pairs unreal claymation with visceral emotions, acutely observing the confused perspectives of the orphanage's occupants. I hope the film's subject matter doesn't put off UK distributors: children and adults alike should see this on the big screen.

The film that came out of nowhere at Cannes this year was *Divines*, the debut of the French Moroccan director Houda Benyamina, which got a storming ten-minute standing ovation after arriving with little or no buzz. From the opening credits – a grainy, breakneck tour of the lives of two teenage girls in Paris



who lark about, posing and dancing via vertical-aspect cameraphone footage – I had a suspicion we were on to something special.

The film's protagonist is Dounia, a 15-year-old wannabe Wolfette of Wall Street – except her current bank is a supermarket where, with her best friend Maimouna, she dons a burka to steal sundries which they sell, with verbal swagger, in the school playground. “My hands are made for gold,” she brags to her classmates, while taunting her teacher for making her do a role-play for a dead-end life as a receptionist. She has bigger dreams, eyeing up the local drug-selling outfit. As Dounia, Oulaya Amamra (who is the director's half-sister) dominates the film – a boisterous, fiery hustler. Through thick and thin (plotting as well as scrapes), we're with her 100 per cent. Has Cannes witnessed such a fierce, manic ball of female teenage energy, fighting to survive on the margins, since the Dardennes' *Rosetta* back in 1999?

The camera hurtles through murky mall and estate back-passages – Dounia and Maimouna's familiar rat-run escape routes – as it tries to keep up with them. Benyamina shows us life on the *banlieue* streets, in the mosque, in the Roma slums where Dounia lives with her mum and aunt, and up in the catwalk of the theatre where she and Maimouna (Déborah Lukumena) ogle and gob on supermarket security guard Djigui, who's auditioning for a local dance troupe.

But what's great about *Divines* is that – until its slightly hokey, overwrought finale – this expertly sketched world is all in the background. The focus is on Dounia and Maimouna's friendship. (Benyamina says she modelled the big-mouthed but petite Dounia and her big softie partner Maimouna on Laurel and Hardy.) She calls herself a “self-taught director” and her film is inspired by her experiences of the 2005 Paris riots. A number of surprising, ambitious aspects make the film more than just a neatly packaged crime thriller – such as the contemporary dance scenes, filmed from high overhead, and, most of all, a magical imaginary ride in a Ferrari.

Another Directors' Fortnight debut deviating from established templates (in this case child's-eye-view social realism) was Shahrbanoo Sadat's **Wolf and Sheep**. The 26-year-old is the first female Afghan director, and her debut was born of her desire to show everyday life in an isolated village



Fairy tale: Shahrbanoo Sadat's modern Afghan-set drama *Wolf and Sheep*

in central Afghanistan (much like the one where she lived for nine years) in a way that challenges the global media's simplistic portrayals of her country. Its mode is mostly naturalistic, following child shepherds going about their daily work, but also observing the segregated worlds of boys fighting and hurling stones down mountains using homemade slings, and girls playing and gossiping. In the midst of this, Sadat zeroes in on the burgeoning friendship between two of the shepherds, both outsiders: Qodrat, a boy whose father has just died and whose mother is remarrying, and Sediqa, who can't see very well and is shunned by the other girls. Scenes of them

illicitly hanging out are punctuated by magical realist interludes inspired by folklore and gossip stories told by the villagers (there's no internet or TV here). The naked green fairy that appears amid the silvery night-time mountains is a delirious spectacle, a human dressed up as a wolf less so; but both demonstrate a daring that many filmmakers in her place might not consider. Sadat's storytelling is subtle and full of welcome loose ends. Even in her tense finale, she never resorts to lachrymose dramatics. Unable, because of security issues, to film in Afghanistan, as she had originally intended, Sadat and her crew built an entire village in the mountains of neighbouring Tajikistan; all of her cast are non-professional actors from Afghanistan.

The most expert mingling of fantasy and ethnography was found in Critics' Week. Oliver Laxe's **Mimosas**, his second feature following his hybrid documentary *You All Are Captains* (2011), may be familiar to those who saw Ben Rivers's *The Sky Trembles and the Earth is Afraid and the*

Oliver Laxe's *Mimosas* was without a doubt the most entrancingly peculiar and adventurous film I saw



Oliver Laxe's *Mimosas*



Delphine and Muriel Coulin's *The Stopover*

Two Eyes Are Not Brothers (2015), in which Rivers played parasite on Laxe's film set, mingling behind-the-scenes footage from *Mimosas* with his own film. However, Laxe's elliptical, time-travelling fable is almost unrecognisable from Rivers's experiment. The film follows a band of travellers, with two scheming non-believers in its ranks, as they escort a dying sheikh on a perilous trek across the Atlas Mountains to his desired resting place. Meanwhile in present-day Morocco, a crowd of men gather to get work driving a fleet of taxis across the desert; one of them, the devout proto-preacher Shakib, is picked, and gradually these documentary-tinged episodes start to mingle with the fictional odyssey. Shakib is mysteriously transported to the mountains, where the sheikh has died, and must convince the two rogues to continue the hazardous trek to bury the body. Split into chapters named after different Sufi praying positions, *Mimosas* is not about religion, but faith. It was without a doubt the most entrancingly peculiar and adventurous film I saw, and with its spectacular parade of taxis fleeing across the desert at sunset and austere mountainscapes, it had some of the most arresting cinematography of the festival. With Koreeda's *After the Storm*, it was one of only two films outside the Competition this year to be shot on actual film (in this case, 16mm).

Other features by emerging directors I saw weren't as successful. The Singaporean filmmaker K. Rajagopal's grim ex-con tale **The Yellow Bird** slipped into plotting extravagance and had some highly unrealistic female characters; while Delphine and Muriel Coulin's **The Stopover**, a drama about two traumatised female soldiers, was hampered by a talky script (how did it win the Un Certain Regard screenplay prize?) – although Ariane Labed and singer-turned actress Soko shone. As always there were ones that got away: I missed Finnish newcomer Juho Kuosmanen black-and-white boxing tale, **The Happiest Day In the Life Of Olli Mäki**, which clinched the Un Certain Regard prize (although reports on that were mixed). I was most sore about losing out on French director Julia Ducournau's debut **Raw**. In the cathedral of high culture and seriousness that is Cannes it was a notable year for genre filmmaking, with Paul Schrader's gleefully demented crime spree



A great try: Sacha Wolff's rugby thriller *Mercenaire*

Dog Eat Dog (a Directors' Fortnight highlight), Refn's *The Neon Demon*, David Mackenzie's gritty heist flick *Hell or High Water* and Paul Verhoeven's twisted psychological thriller *Elle*. It was great to see at least one film by a female director among them, even if I'd hoped for more. I heard and read good things about Ducournau's veterinary-college-set femme body-horror and look forward very much to its UK arrival.

One other debut stood out: *Mercenaire* raises the question of why there aren't more films about rugby. After all, how could a sport that has rolling mauls not be cinematic? Sacha Wolff tells a familiar underdog story but does so with a

large dose of realism, showing the everyday body-pounding that goes into the sport, even at the lowest tiers of the professional game. *Mercenaire* centres on Soane, who has been plucked from the Pacific island of Wallis to play in an industrial French no-name/nowhere town; his deal falls through when his body weight is below what's expected, and after landing in France he goes on the run from the middleman he owes money to. Being French and tackling father-son strife and ruthless life on society's edges, Wolff's film calls to mind the work of Jacques Audiard. While it doesn't have Audiard's intense immediacy and attention to negative space (the script blurts out too much for my liking), it's a rich, absorbing character study that sketches the worlds of Wallis and rugby well. Newcomer Toki Pilioko gives a stellar performance as gentle giant Soane, while cinematographer Samuel Lahu, who also makes his fiction feature debut, is another talent to watch. 📺

In the cathedral of high culture and seriousness that is Cannes it was a notable year for genre filmmaking



Juho Kuosmanen's *The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Mäki*



Julia Ducournau's *Raw*

THE BEAUTY MYTH

Nicolas Winding Refn's 'The Neon Demon', a violent exploration of society's obsession with beauty set in the cut-throat world of the Los Angeles fashion scene, is a modern-day genre fairytale that sends its innocent protagonist on a dangerous journey into the unknown

By Christina Newland

Nicolas Winding Refn has a propensity for the grandiose statement. When I meet him in a bustling Copenhagen restaurant to talk about his latest film, *The Neon Demon*, he tells me, with a glint of impish humour in his eyes, "Every man has a 16-year-old girl inside him." *The Neon Demon*, he says, is an expression of his. If that's so, I'm not sure his inner teenager is one I want to meet. With enough female cruelty to send Brian De Palma running for the exit – not to mention glam-rock levels of glitter and a run-in with a mountain lion – this is Refn on typically bold, divisive form.

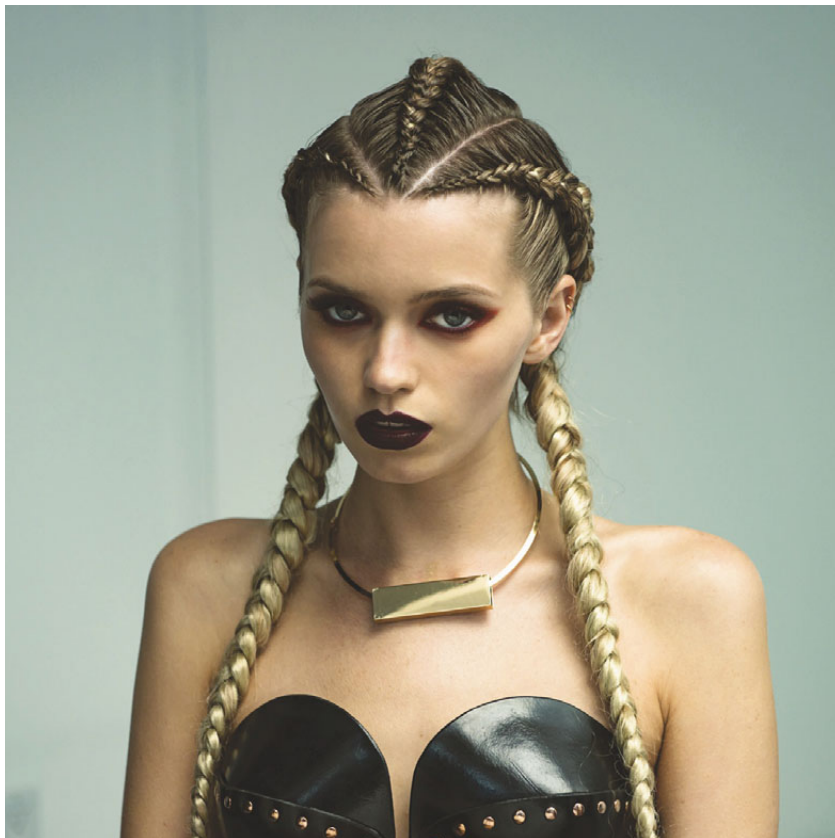
The 16-year-old girl at the heart of Refn's film is the waif-like Jesse (Elle Fanning), who lives out of a shabby motel room in Los Angeles, joining hordes of aspiring models looking for a break in the fashion industry. Fanning plays her age – dewy and flaxen-haired, all doe eyes and loose limbs. Her sudden success as a model comes partly through naiveté and partly through matter-of-fact ambition. "Pretty makes money," she sighs. But Jesse is more than 'pretty' – she has a luminous purity, the elusive 'it'. Everyone seems to want a piece of her.

Orbiting Jesse are two jaded rival models (Abbey Lee and Bella Heathcote), a lecherous motel landlord (Keanu Reeves) and a makeup artist who is infatuated with her (Jena Malone). As per Refn's worldview, it

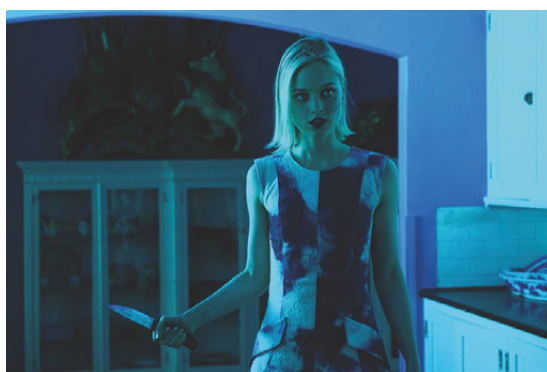




FASHION VICTIM
In *The Neon Demon* Jesse (played by Elle Fanning) is a 16-year-old trying to break into the modelling industry in Los Angeles who soon finds herself surrounded by people who want to corrupt or possess her beauty



CRIMES OF FASHION
In *The Neon Demon*, directed by Nicolas Winding Refn (opposite) protagonist Jesse faces competition from a pair of rival models, played by Bella Heathcote (right), while Jena Malone is a make-up artist (below) who is infatuated with her



seems that those around her want nothing more than to corrupt, own or consume her beauty.

It's a tale as old as humanity, Refn insists. "I like reading fairytales, and every fairytale begins with a young, beautiful girl facing the unknown: the dangerous forest or the dangerous big city." Fittingly, *The Neon Demon* has a strange dreamlike quality. As the drama unfolds, Jesse is an oasis of almost eerie calm. It's sensual, slow-burn filmmaking, with little of the bagginess that marked his previous feature, *Only God Forgives* (2013).

"I wanted it to be a genre film," Refn says, and there certainly are horror elements – cannibalism and necrophilia, for a start. Cliff Martinez's swooping electronic score heightens the sense of mounting dread, building to a bloodbath similar to Italian *gialli* in its stylish intensity. Refn has always professed his love for genre film, from guns-blazing action to the kung-fu movie, but his own work has typically straddled a line between genre territory (*Pusher*, 1996; *Bronson*, 2008; *Drive*, 2011) and stylised abstraction (*Valhalla Rising*, 2009; *Only God Forgives*). Tellingly, he is a friend and vocal admirer of Alejandro Jodorowsky, one of cinema's least classifiable filmmakers. *Drive* and *Only God Forgives* ends with a dedication to the Chilean surrealist.

The Neon Demon is once again a hybrid piece – an overcooked female psychodrama, catty and occasionally descending into camp. It's also the first of Refn's films to address such feminine subject matter. Accordingly, many of the creative team on the film are women, from his co-screenwriters (playwrights Polly Stenham and Mary Laws) to his director of photography (Natasha Braier). "The way she [Braier] paid attention to the close-ups of the women – I doubt if you would have had the same interest or nuances if you had a man doing that," Refn says. "I generally like working with women rather than men. I didn't want it to become man's version of a woman on screen – I had no intention of doing that."

There's another major female influence too: Refn's family. The film is dedicated to his wife, Liv Corfixen. "In a way, without her beauty, I don't think I would have thought of the idea," he says. "I probably didn't cast anyone without her saying yes or no. So we try to collaborate as much as we can." The couple have two daughters, aged six and 12, and they were also on his mind throughout the shoot. "I wanted to make a film about purity and preying on purity. No matter what, I can see my own children – they are already preyed upon by the things they want to have or see. It's all about consuming youth. Everyone's getting younger as a target group."

THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE DAMNED

Female beauty is the major preoccupation of *The Neon Demon* – how it's lusted after, envied and worn as a mantle. The world it depicts is predatory and jealous, allowing little room for female friendship or kindness. Although nurturing relationships have never figured strongly in Refn's films, this is an especially pessimistic vision – his film is populated by shallow, competitive women. "I wanted to make a film about the insanity of beauty," he says. "And it had to have a structure with a protagonist and an antagonist. But I also think that's everyone – men and women. I don't think it's necessarily one sex that's worse than the other. People are equally terrible when they're terrible."



"But we're making drama, making fantasy. And I don't make films about reality. I used to, but I realised I would never capture it for real, no matter how hard I tried. Can you say *Lady Macbeth* is a representation of every woman? No, she's not – she's a certain kind of woman who's very dramatic."

Even the initially hesitant Jesse eventually becomes taken with her own looks, gaining a flimsy sense of power from them. She stands near an empty swimming pool, rhapsodising about her own beauty. But the degree to which her looks are empowering is ultimately a sham; it can't protect Jesse from the dangers of LA life. The girl's transition – from innocence to narcissism – offers a parable about the overestimation of female beauty. She is constantly told of its importance, but the moment Jesse defines and owns her appearance, it's intolerable for those around her. This might be a sly commentary on gender. But it might also simply be the logical finale of a blood-soaked genre showdown.

Given its depiction of sleazy photographers and the like, one would be forgiven for thinking this was an outsider's critique of LA showbiz crassness. But while Refn doesn't deny that the entertainment industry has much to answer for, he assures me he loves the city. "It's probably one of my favourite places in the world. It has all this mythology. California is where the settlers stopped – they couldn't get any further out because of the Pacific. LA is this strange sprawling place. There's something magical you can't put your finger on, and you're either into it or you're not."

There's certainly something magical in Refn's version of the city. There are moments where the film dips into abstraction, and the symbolism is blatantly occult in nature. Mirrored prisms, triangles, the moon and even a

woman's open legs recur throughout, invoking the lunar and menstrual cycles of womanhood. "There's a lot of [English occultist] Aleister Crowley in the film," Refn explains. "And I would have a tarot reading by Jodorowsky every weekend about how the movie was turning out, so a lot of that kind of symbolism went into the film. The whole Crowley philosophy of 'do what thou wilt', it was all charged by a sexual revolution before there was one."

"There is something incredibly powerful about this cycle that women have, something magical, and there is, I believe, a certain higher power about it. There are a lot of myths written about what menstrual blood does and all those things. It's just the idea that women have the mechanics of creating life. It obviously shows that women have the upper hand. It's just been men trying to control it and it's uncontrollable. In terms of how women have been shown by the media, it [female sexuality] is still an unexplored world. And it's the centre of the universe. Maybe it's just too big a question for people to cope with, especially men."

Female sexuality is a novel subject to take up, given that Refn has previously displayed little interest in on-screen sex. "I just don't find it very interesting to see," he says, pointing out that there is only one other instance of it in his work – in *Pusher II* (2004). *The Neon Demon*, on the other hand, is bursting with forbidden desire and outright perversion. Does sex have to be deviant and violent to hold his attention?

"You can always define a character, in fantasy, as made up of two elements: sex and violence. And if you sexualise the violence, it becomes much more terrifying, because it penetrates a lot deeper into your own subconscious. When we were born as, I guess, apes, we had physical parts of our body that could be used

I wanted to make a film about purity and preying on purity. My own children are already preyed upon by things they want to have or see. It's all about consuming youth



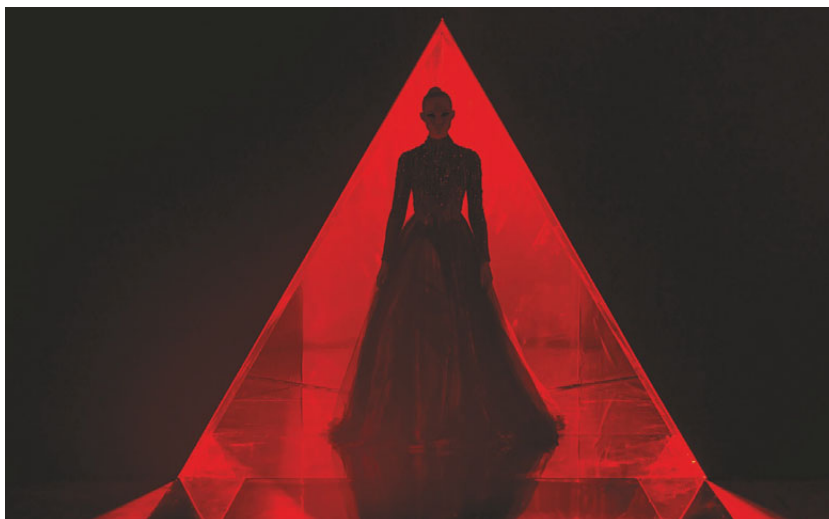
as violent mechanisms. Over time, we no longer needed to kill or defend, so these parts of our bodies were no longer tools of violence. So society came, and order came, and democracy came and so forth. But the instincts don't disappear. They go into our fantasy."

Refn has never been one for understatement. His approach is one of broad strokes and bold stereotype – take the crushingly unsubtle parallel suggested by the fact that Jena Malone's Ruby is a beautician who dolls up both models and corpses in a morgue. But crass as it can be, Refn's work is always vibrant, and rarely predictable.

The Neon Demon will certainly not be for everyone, and it leaves Refn open to a potential hammering from some critics. He seems unfazed. "Everybody wants to be loved, but there's also something interesting about being hated. It means you've struck a nerve. So I like diversity – there's a kind of sadistic enjoyment in it, in a way. Of course you want to be purely praised, but there's perverse pleasure in not being – especially with *Only God Forgives*. It wasn't just hated, it was like people couldn't stop."

Refn may have coped well with the critical response to his previous film, but he admits that he still struggles with the emotions of the shooting process. "It takes a lot of paranoia and panic," he says. Because he shoots his films chronologically, there's a very narrow margin of error. "I know roughly what kind of ending I want, but I don't know how I'm going to get there. And every day is terrifying, because it can potentially ruin everything. Because you can't go back; I work with very limited funds. So it's got to work, and it's got to work now. But I like that gamble – it makes me high. I like the fear."

Given his reputation as one of cinema's foremost aesthetes, Refn is amusingly evasive about his process. It's "very mundane, normal filmmaking", he says with a smile. He is colour blind, and has never storyboarded. Yet his films are precisely framed, bursting with lurid colour and decadent touches. In *The Neon Demon*, the visuals morph throughout. Sometimes we see Los Angeles bathed in glowing pastel light, peaches and lilacs that accentuate Jesse's milky beauty. In nightclubs and photoshoots, the lighting is blindingly high-contrast, the colours more stark and threatening. The costume design is just as carefully considered and laden with symbolism. Jesse's sweet adolescence is evoked through breezy, unaffected sundresses and a pair of Converse trainers.



LIVING COLOUR
Nicolas Winding Refn is colour-blind and has never storyboarded, yet in *The Neon Demon* (above, below), as in his previous films, everything is precisely framed and bursting with lurid colour

Her mysterious cohort played by Malone is decked out in louche, witchy 70s pieces, while Abbey Lee's model competitor wears studded leather jackets and pointy black fingernails.

"I used a very good designer [Erin Benach], who also did *Drive* with me. The challenge was that I had very little money – we were hoping we could get a lot of sponsorship. There was only so much you could do with going to thrift shops, and for it to partly be about high-end fashion. It was difficult even getting things to borrow as the only thing we could offer people was a thank you."

Refn collaborated heavily on the costume design – as with nearly everything else – so he's coy about being called an auteur. He thinks the word "strange", but admits, "If it means doing what you want to do, I guess so." Ask him about his collaborators, though, and his answer is more revealing: "Well, everything needs to be about me. I'm very egotistical when I work. I can only function out of how I essentially react to it – I have no interest in how others react. I love to collaborate, and it's important to have collaborators, or else you'll repeat yourself... but the way I work is that you feed on other people – to get what you need – and then move on."

In many ways *Only God Forgives* and *The Neon Demon* are iterations of the same unwavering, almost militantly auteurist vision. They're very nearly aligned to 19th-century aestheticism, whose proponents believed in beauty without utility: that art should be neither instructive nor 'useful' in any traditional sense.

"Art for art's sake is only interesting if it has any effect," Refn explains. "But that's the one thing that no one can ever take away from me. I approach every film I make as if it were going to be the last one. And if it's going to be the last one, OK. At least I'm going out with a bang. And so far, as long as you make money, there's always going to be the next one. So you need to be smart. But I have only one interest, which is to make what I would like to see, and being smart by making it inexpensive. Because if it's art for art's sake you better make sure you know economics. Otherwise you'll very quickly be out of the job."

"In my world, I want and demand complete control. Otherwise I can't give myself 500 per cent. And life's short, so I don't want to spend my life compromising. I don't."



The Neon Demon is released in UK cinemas on 8 July and will be reviewed in the next issue



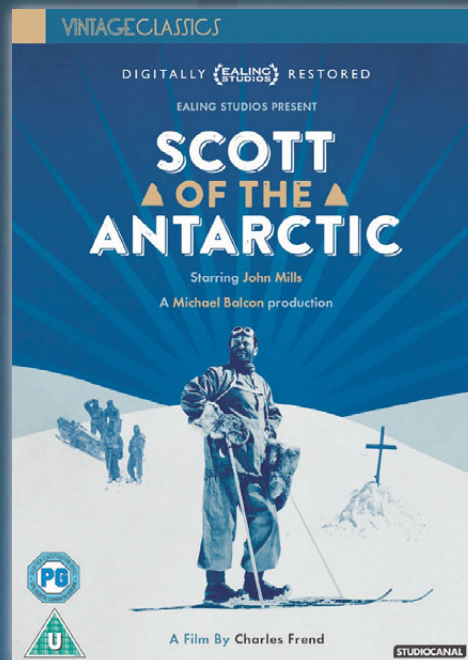
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STUDIOCANAL

HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS

Yonebayashi Hiromasa's 'When Marnie Was There' transposes a classic of English children's literature to modern-day Japan to tell the tale of an orphan discovering the dark secrets of her past, in what might well be the last in-house feature from the great animation house Studio Ghibli

By Nick Bradshaw

Joan G. Robinson's 1967 children's classic *When Marnie Was There* – the story of a solitary and brooding London orphan called Anna who is sent to stay with family friends for a summer on the north Norfolk coast, where she encounters a kindred spirit called Marnie living in the mysterious Marsh House – now comes with a post-script appended by Robinson's daughter Deborah Sheppard in 2002. In it Sheppard relates the story of a Japanese man, a fan of the book since his youth, who had ventured out on the same coastal bus ride as Anna in hopes of making a pilgrimage to the story's setting of Little Overton. None of the man's fellow passengers had heard of the village, however, and he was beginning to get rather anxious when the bus drew into Burnham Overy, and he recognised the very windmill that haunts Marnie's imagination – and then too the Granary which Robinson fictionalised as the Marsh House, and the marsh path to the beach where Anna and Marnie make their magical trysts. (Sheppard describes him even managing to find a local Japanese resident, who kept in touch and later delivered him a photo of Robinson.)

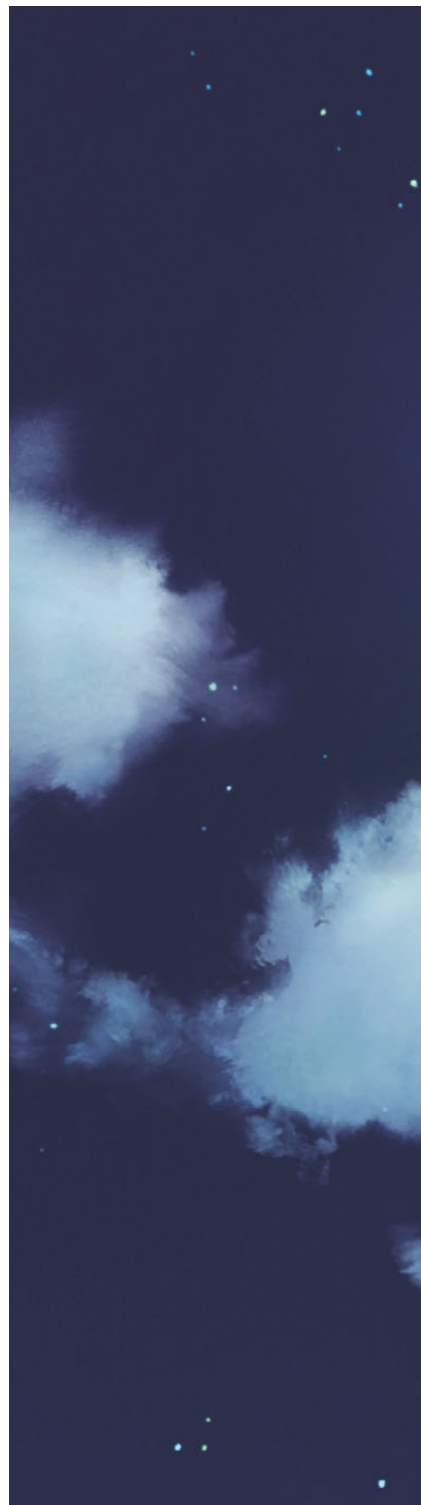
Given that Japan's Studio Ghibli has now adapted *Marnie* at the behest of Miyazaki Hayao, the great animator known for his love of both European landscapes and classic children's literature, one's fancies wander. Could this pilgrim possibly have been Miyazaki-san? After all, *Marnie* appears on his list of 50 great children's books shortly after *The Borrowers* (adapted at Ghibli as *Arrietty* in 2010 by Miyazaki's former key animator Yonebayashi Hiromasa) and *The Little Prince* (an influence

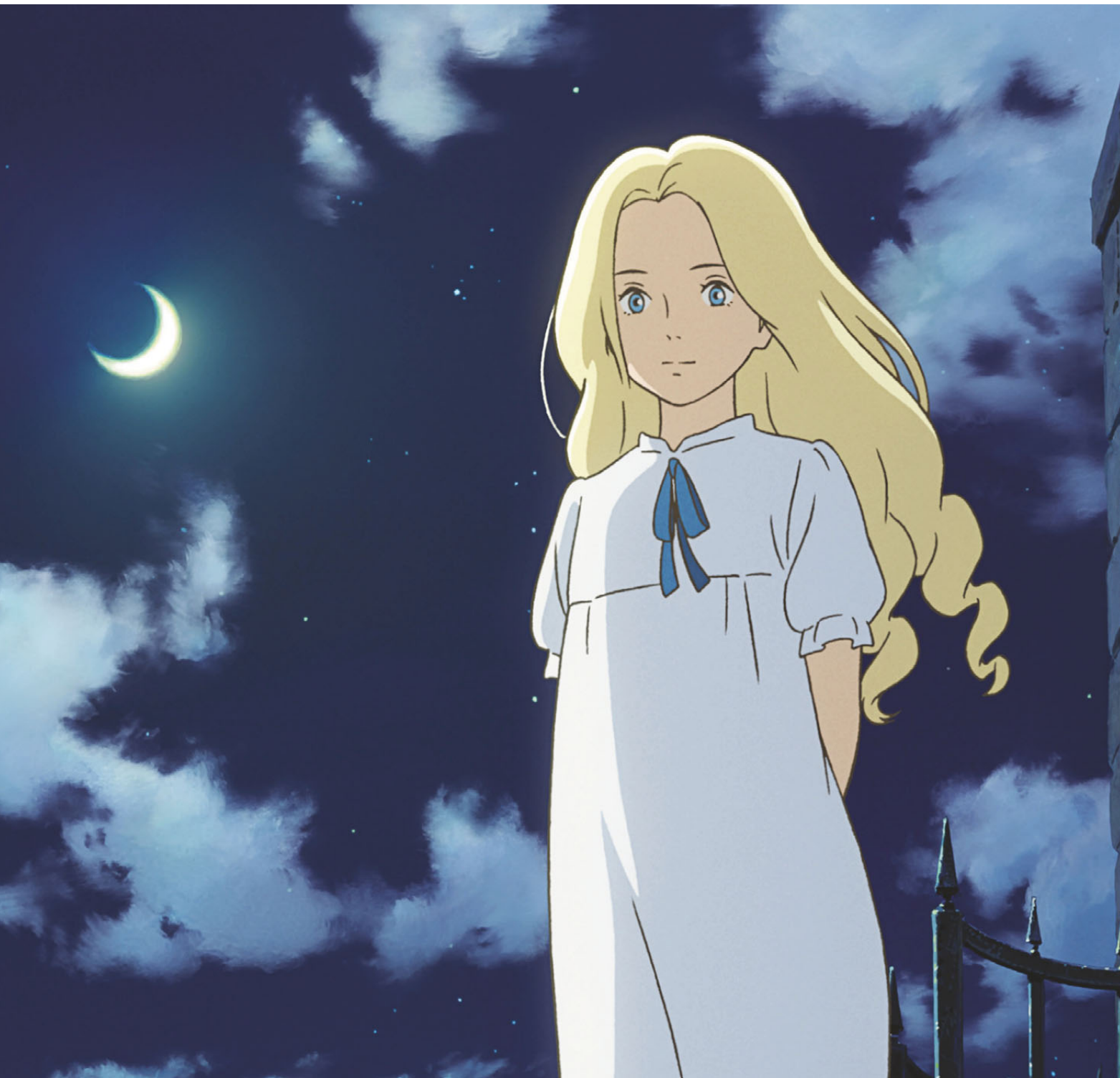
on Miyazaki's 2013 film *The Wind Rises*). According to Yonebayashi, who was also tasked with the adaptation of *Marnie*, the answer is no – but the book's Japanese translator did know the man, and Yonebayashi had heard of the episode and even seen photos the man had taken of Burnham Overy.

Yonebayashi's *Marnie* moves the story's present tense to modern-day Hokkaido, Japan's northern island, but otherwise takes fewer liberties with the moods and meanings of Robinson's text than, say, Miyazaki did in his 2004 adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*; Marnie even remains a blue-eyed blonde, to Miyazaki's reported consternation. Like *Arrietty*, it's dramatically discreet, without the madness of Miyazaki's fantasias, but rich in visual detail, and steeped in Ghibli's reverence for the power of nature: the trickiness of the light, the wilfulness of the sea. Where *Arrietty* was built around relativities of space and scale, with its characters living among insects and hiding from towering humans, *Marnie* remoulds time, transposing us through eras to reconnect with our late ancestors' experiences and stories: both the 50-year-old book itself, and the lives it reaches back further to remember.

All of which makes it, if not Ghibli's very finest hour and 43 minutes, then certainly a wondrous and heart-felt keepsake, a bequest from a legendary studio now in a state of suspension. Only in 2014 had *Marnie*'s then 37-year-old producer Nishimura Yoshiaki, also justly credited with steering the intractable Takahata Isao through the interminable production of his *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013), been nominated as heir to Ghibli's founding producer Suzuki Toshio. But as confirmed in the fleeting interview I got when Nishimura and the 42-year-old Yonebayashi passed through London last October, both men have since left the building. Whether they jumped or were pushed by a sceptical hierarchy is not clear, but their departures follow that of Miyazaki's son Goro, who after directing *Tales from Earthsea* (2006) and *From up on Poppy Hill* (2011) moved on to the broadcaster NHK to direct a CG cel-shaded anime series based on Astrid Lindgren's fantasy book *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*. As with Michaël Dudok de Wit's *The Red Turtle*, which has just premiered at Cannes (see page 35), Studio Ghibli co-produced that series. Miyazaki is also promising to direct more shorts for the Ghibli Museum, but it seems highly probable that, in terms of the

MAGIC IN THE MOONLIGHT
In Yonebayashi Hiromasa's
When Marnie Was There, the
young orphan Anna (right,
with dark hair) is sent to live
for the summer in a small
seaside town on Hokkaido
where she meets the
mysterious Marnie (above)
whom she first spies in the
Marsh House (far right)





studio's unparalleled three-decade run of in-house feature animations to treasure, *Marnie* will be the studio's final gift to the world.

Nick Bradshaw: Your film follows a story about finding a refuge from the metropolis, using geography as a route to an alternative world and way of life. When did you first read the novel and what did you think of it?

Yonebayashi Hiromasa: It was a very absorbing and moving tale, but I thought it would be really difficult to make, because the story is mostly written as a depiction of Anna's internal thoughts and feelings. It was difficult to think how to visualise that. Actually Mr Suzuki asked me to work on the book, and initially I said, "No, it is too difficult," and turned him down.

But I thought about Anna and Marnie and came up with the scene when they dance, which isn't in the original novel. Or the set-up with Anna as a girl who draws: that wasn't in the novel either. As I came up with these I was beginning to convince myself that it could be a beautiful story.

NB: Turning her into a visual artist gives you more access to her in a visual medium.

YH: Of course, we could just have resorted to a monologue, but because I'm an animator, I wanted to express her thoughts through her actions. The pictures she draws, and even the way she draws – her physical position and everything – reflects her mind and soul. But yes, that visualisation was very difficult.

NB: This is your second adaptation of an English children's classic, following *Arrietty*. Is that a special relationship for you?

YH: It's because Miyazaki likes English children's classic literature. He chose the book and I was given it by Suzuki, the producer, and read it. Of course I enjoyed and was moved by *Arrietty*'s source novel [*The Borrowers*] too, and its central theme is something adults can relate to as well. And because this is children's literature, the ending isn't going to be like a disaster; there is hope at the end. That's how Miyazaki likes it too. And I liked the way it ended. A disastrous ending is not only hard on an audience, but on the creators as well.

NB: I found the visual styling very evocative, particularly in terms of place and interiors as expressions of states of mind. For example, Anna's bedroom in Sapporo conveyed a strong sense of the present and what life might be like for a girl in such a city now, and that helped to make the contrast with the sense of something different in the countryside.



Because this is children's literature, there is hope at the end. A disastrous ending is not only hard on an audience, but on the creators as well

SECOND COMING
When Marnie Was There is the second adaptation of a classic of English children's literature by Yonebayashi Hiromasa (above), following *Arrietty* (below), his take on Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*



It's not something a Miyazaki film would dwell on. I wondered if you were conscious of any attempt to do anything different in visual terms, or develop the Ghibli house style?

YH: I'm glad you noticed because the background is very significant. It was important to depict Anna indoors: when you see her in her room you can tell what kind of a person she is. And when she enters her room in the country house, it was important that you can see people who lived in it before she moved in. And I took a lot of care to show a difference between the Marsh House past and present.

Scenery also depicts Anna's mood and state of mind: the sky, water or wind. In the novel there is a phrase: the sky is described as grey as a pearl. I interpreted that as an image of Anna's soul. Ghibli's films usually have blue skies and white clouds, whereas in this film the sky is cloudy all the time. So there's a difference.


NB: What can you tell me about your hopes and plans for the future, and the shape of Ghibli at this point?

YH: I made *Arrietty* and *Marnie* as sort of static films as opposed to dynamic films. So in the future I'd like to make a fantasy film where the characters are dynamically moving.

Nishimura Yoshiaki: You should really ask Ghibli's publicity department about the future of Ghibli. But so many animation directors are influenced by the studio that for myself, probably there will be work, feature films, to make with those directors and for the legacy of Ghibli. But whether or not it would be released as a Ghibli film I really don't know because at the moment Ghibli has decided not to make any more feature-length films.

[Here the translator intervenes to point out that both Yonebayashi and Nishimura have already left Ghibli; Nishimura has set up his own company – Studio Ponoc.]

NB: I'd like to see a film set in the Studio Ghibli offices now, in their current state of suspended reality. It sounds an interesting environment in itself.

NY: Sorry; that would be up to Miyazaki and Suzuki... 

 **When *Marnie Was There* is released in UK cinemas on 10 June and is reviewed on page 90**

CAST AWAY

For the first time, Studio Ghibli has collaborated with an outside animator, Michaël Dudok de Wit, and his breathtaking *'The Red Turtle'* proves a worthy heir to this Ghibli tradition

By Isabel Stevens

At the start of *The Red Turtle*, a hand-drawn Totoro flashes up on screen. The friendly furry beast adorns Studio Ghibli's familiar logo. Normally it has a sky-blue wash behind it. But in honour of Dutch animator Michaël Dudok de Wit's *The Red Turtle*, the studio's first non-Japanese production, here it is bathed in red.

"If one day Studio Ghibli decides to produce an animator from outside the studio, it will be him," was Miyazaki's pronouncement after watching Dudok de Wit's Oscar-winning animated short *Father and Daughter* (2000). The eight-minute film has a lot of Ghibli-isms: it's about loss; it tackles its melancholy subject with deceptively simple drawings; above all, it pays close attention to nature. Miyazaki, the lover of clouds, no doubt saw the many different and luminous ways Dudok de Wit sketched the sky using just sepia tones and recognised a kindred spirit.

Sixteen years after *Father and Daughter*, Studio Ghibli and Dudok de Wit's collaboration has finally reached the screen, premiering at Cannes last month and likely to be released in the UK next year by StudioCanal. A lover of short films, Dudok de Wit initially had little interest in making a feature. He liked working on his own, and believed a feature would be too complicated and involve too much compromise. That is until he heard who might produce his debut – and even then he thought an email from Ghibli was a cruel joke. *The Red Turtle* was made in France, with Ghibli co-founder Takahata Isao acting as artistic producer (he and Dudok de Wit talked at length about the film's story and philosophical aspects). It is 80 minutes long and, like Dudok's shorts, completely wordless. His initial script contained dialogue and was too long. When they were at the animatic stage of sketching the film with static images, he felt it didn't always work cinematically. French director Pascale Ferran came on board as co-scriptwriter and gradually the dialogue was removed and the narrative made clearer. In all, the film took nine years to make.

It begins in the middle of a storm. Grey waves and raindrops engulf the screen. In the corner, a tiny head surfaces and then sinks. The nameless man is washed up on a beach with bits of his broken boat. A crab crawls up his leg. He goes to explore and the view pulls




Turtle recall: the drawings of *The Red Turtle* echo the woodblock prints of ukiyo-e artist Kawase Hasui

back to reveal a remote island as his cries ring out. His only company is a cast of crabs (such an apt collective noun!). Several times he tries to escape on a makeshift bamboo raft, but each time a mysterious force in the water wreaks havoc with his lovingly assembled boat. Eventually he discovers his secretive aggressor: the red turtle.

I'll leave it there with the plot, because you won't want to know any more about a mythical fantasy like this before you see it. It has dream sequences and weighty allegories about life that seem to have put the odd Cannes viewer off – but don't worry, they're not too neat. Pictures are the film's currency and they are, without exaggeration, sublime. There aren't too many facial close-ups – about as many of the man as there are of spiders and caterpillars, crabs and leaves. The motif from Romantic painting of an individual subsumed by nature is a recurring one: what changes is the island. The attention to details of the sky (its magic-hour glow tinting the whole island), water (grey and angry one moment, a transparent azure expanse the next), even the

sand (at times you can even see the grains in smudges of charcoal) is quite extraordinary. The film is a masterclass in chiaroscuro: shadows are just as intricately sketched as the life forms that cause them. Even from a distance, a bottle washed up on the beach has a lighter shadow than a human's.

Dudok de Wit's shorts have hitherto been hand-drawn. *The Red Turtle* was mostly too, but for the first time the director drew on a tablet using Cintiq, a digital pen. Only the giant red turtle and the raft were too complex to be done using this process and were animated with a computer. Meanwhile the backgrounds were sketched using charcoal on paper, lending the film a delicate artisanal grain and a remarkable depth of field. It's not surprising to hear that one of the inspirations behind *The Red Turtle* was Japanese ukiyo-e artist Kawase Hasui: the vivid, intricate landscapes of his woodblock prints are clearly echoed in the surge of marks that make up leaves, waves, yellowy grasses and lingering sunlight in Dudok de Wit's film. The island, though sketched with such attention to light, shade and texture, is never an exotic paradise and can often seem like a watery hell despite its bright palette.

The film is a must for the big screen. "I am a big softie. I'm a romantic. I like to cry," said Dudok de Wit in an interview last year. You have been warned: pack tissues. 

The film is a masterclass in chiaroscuro: shadows are just as intricately sketched as the life forms that cause them

STEEL AND SILK

THE LIFE OF OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND

On the eve of her 100th birthday, we celebrate the career of the last of the great pre-World War II Hollywood stars, a woman who was not only a fabulous performer but also a thorn in the side of the studios, winning a key legal battle for which every actor in Tinseltown owed a debt of gratitude

By Farran Smith Nehme

It will always be **Olivia de Havilland's** most famous film, so let's start with *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Midway through, Vivien Leigh's Scarlett O'Hara unloads a pistol in the face of a Union Army deserter who's come to ransack Tara, the family mansion. He obligingly drops dead, and for a few panicked seconds Scarlett wonders what to do. And then we hear a clatter and footsteps on the stairs. It's Melanie, who was upstairs in bed recovering from a childbirth that nearly killed her. The camera moves down Melanie's nightgown to reveal that the clatter was the sound of a sword she's been dragging behind her. She is panting a little with exertion, too weak to raise the weapon, but still Melanie is there, ready to fight to the death if need be. Melanie's decorous exterior masks what the book's author Margaret Mitchell called "thin-steel, spun-silk courage". That quality is why de Havilland was born to play Melanie.

It was a part she almost didn't get. Not because producer David O. Selznick and the movie's original director George Cukor had doubts about her ability, but because de Havilland's boss Jack Warner liked her right where she was, playing lady loves opposite Errol Flynn and classing up mediocrities like *Hard to Get* (1938). De Havilland pleaded with Warner's wife, Ann, and her intercession caused him to agree to the loan-out, though the boss grumbled that de Havilland would come back and make trouble.

Oh no, de Havilland assured him, she wouldn't dream of it. Hadn't she been the soul of professionalism for several years now? Why, she came to Warners in 1935 to play Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the great Max Reinhardt. And before that film was even released, she was required to make her screen debut opposite rubber-faced comedian Joe E. Brown in *Alibi Ike*, a far cry from Shakespeare.

Starting with *Captain Blood* the same year, de Havilland had minted money for the studio playing opposite Errol Flynn in film after film: *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *Dodge City* (1939). Her interplay with Flynn is the template for action-movie romance ever since: pretty young woman takes a strong dislike to the protagonist, mocks him, brushes off his attentions. Gradually, she notices that he's a fine man; in fact, he's the hero. Embrace, kiss, *finis*. They adhere to a formula, but these are splendid movies, exquisitely made and beautiful to behold, directed with barrelling energy by Michael Curtiz. And de Havilland's subtle playing, and her chemistry with Flynn, are essential to their appeal.

Observe the balcony scene in *Robin Hood*, a more romantic moment than Hollywood ever managed with *Romeo and Juliet*. De Havilland's eager anticipation as Flynn climbs up to her, the moments when she tries to conceal it, the gasp of genuine fright when

THE PROUD REBEL
Olivia de Havilland was blacklisted by studio head Jack Warner when she took legal action over a contract dispute and as a result didn't work from the age of 26 to 28, until the California Supreme Court found in her favour and freed her for subsequent roles



he nearly falls – she plays with absolute sincerity. Years later, in a talk she gave for the BFI, de Havilland called these movies “the best of their kind”, and to this day she’s right.

And yet, a de Havilland role meant staying on the sidelines. The movies did not revolve around her character. She played these women with spirit, but they were not complex, dynamic or conflicted. She is wonderfully funny in *The Great Garrick* (1937) and *It’s Love I’m After* (1937), both comedies about actors who are never truly off stage. But de Havilland’s characters are the ones who haven’t a clue what’s going on – they are playing it for real while everyone else tries on roles. No wonder she jumped at Melanie, whose screen time is nearly equal to Rhett Butler’s, and who offered a chance to play strength, yearning, loyalty and tragedy.

When *Gone with the Wind* was over, even before it was released, before she’d garnered the best reviews of her life, before her Oscar nomination, back de Havilland went. She wound up in a movie she later described vaguely as “a third remake of something”, found herself farmed out to Goldwyn for a remake of warhorse *Raffles* (1939) that she knew was doomed, and then was back with Flynn for *Santa Fe Trail* (1940). By no means were these all insipid parts in bad movies. Several are classics, such as Raoul Walsh’s *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941), with de Havilland as the would-be suffragette in love with James Cagney’s brawling dentist. Near-farcical at first, the movie grows more tender and sombre, building to a park reunion between Cagney and de Havilland that Walsh called “one of the most emotional scenes I ever filmed”.

But, as de Havilland has always cheerfully acknowledged, Jack Warner was right. She complained. She began to turn down scripts, and for that she was put on suspension. By May 1943 her contract was up, and she happily anticipated a new phase. Now she could seek out more parts like the lovelorn schoolteacher betrayed by Charles Boyer in Mitchell Leisen’s *Hold Back the Dawn* (1941) – a film she loved, which had earned her another Oscar nod, achieved on loan to Paramount. Not so fast, said the brothers Warner. She had to serve out the additional six months she had accrued on suspension.

De Havilland contemplated the studio offering she’d just completed, a third-billed turn in a Brontë sisters’ biopic called *Devotion* (1945), playing a bizarre version of Charlotte Brontë who flounces around in dainty clothes, steals Emily’s fiancé, and is never glimpsed holding a pen. De Havilland sued.

The lovely Livvy was tilting at windmills, was the consensus around town. Asked in her BFI interview if she garnered support from her colleagues, she said, without rancour, “I was rather by myself, because nobody thought I could win.” Her lawyer thought she could, however, by invoking an old California ‘anti-peonage’ (debt slavery) law which forbade contracts that extended past seven years. In November 1943 the case went to trial.

As soon as she filed suit, Jack Warner wrote to every studio in town to remind them that she was still effectively under contract. In court the studio didn’t hesitate to fight dirty, insinuating that an affair was the real reason the actress had turned down one movie. The Warner attorneys, however, hadn’t reckoned on the de Havilland sang-froid. She had spent years on set with Michael Curtiz, one of the most notorious yellers in the



BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)



business; these guys were nothing. So when one lawyer thundered, "Is it not true, Miss de Havilland, that on the morning of January 16, you wantonly refused to show up for work on Stage 8?" "Certainly not," came the reply in that musical de Havilland voice. "I declined."

The judge ruled for de Havilland, but not until March 1944. Warner Brothers appealed, Jack Warner dropped producers another line to say the matter was far from over, and for the rest of the year de Havilland stayed, as Otto Friedrich put it in *City of Nets*, his portrait of Hollywood in the 1940s, "unemployed and unemployable".

For two years de Havilland made no movies, from the age of 26 to 28, vital years for an actress. Her legal bills mounted; she drew on her savings and, after the first ruling in her favour, found some work on radio. She refused to give in, and she refused to stay idle. She travelled to Alaska to visit soldiers, and such was Warner's pettiness that, according to Friedrich, he wrote to General Hap Arnold seeking to stop her entertaining the troops. Arnold, unlike Hollywood, told Warner to mind his own business. The court of appeals ruled in de Havilland's favour, and Warner Brothers appealed to the California Supreme Court. She went to the South Pacific, visiting the wounded and contracting pneumonia so severe that

THE GOLDEN AGE
Olivia de Havilland in
(clockwise from top left)
The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938), *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941), *The Dark Mirror* (1946), *The Snake Pit* (1948) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

A de Havilland role meant staying on the sidelines. The movies did not revolve around her character

she coughed blood and her weight dropped to 90 pounds. De Havilland was convalescing in the hospital in the Fiji islands when word came that the Supreme Court had refused to hear the studio's appeal. She'd won.

Years before, Bette Davis had failed in her attempt to challenge her contract. Jack Warner had just found out that his all-purpose flower-like *ingénue* was tougher than Jezebel. Davis later said, "Every actor in the business owes Olivia de Havilland a debt of gratitude for taking us out of bondage." The tide was turning before de Havilland's suit – as Emily Carman recently wrote in *Independent Stardom* (see *S&S* review, Books, June), for years some actresses had forged deals that gave them freedom to choose roles – but it was de Havilland who stopped the endless cycle of suspension and contract extensions. De Havilland also took great pride in the fact that her victory helped actors such as Clark Gable, James Stewart, Glenn Ford and Henry Fonda, whose contracts were suspended while they served in World War II. They returned to find that the clock hadn't stopped, and thanks to de Havilland, they could renegotiate their terms.

Almost immediately (technically, her reintroduction was a forgotten trifle called *The Well-Groomed Bride*), de Havilland showed everyone in town what they, and she, had been missing. Insisting on Mitchell Leisen, who had directed her so well in *Hold Back the Dawn*, de Havilland made *To Each His Own* (1946) for Paramount. A story of thwarted maternal love, co-starring John Lund as both ill-fated lover and illegitimate son, this was a showcase indeed. Her baby son is housed with her sworn enemy, she tries to take him back but the boy rejects her, she becomes a cosmetics tycoon... yes, it's quite a plot (the story was conceived by Billy Wilder's long-time screenwriter Charles Brackett) but de Havilland rises to every twist. "Nobody else could have played it as well as she did," said Leisen, "to be so beautiful and innocent in the beginning, then grow to be a bitch and finally the lonely Miss Norris." She won her first Academy Award for the role. When we think of actresses who fought for their careers, we think of Davis, Joan Crawford, Barbara Stanwyck; we should think too of de Havilland, who fought as hard, or harder, than any of them.

More great roles followed, most of them ones that Jack Warner wouldn't have let her anywhere near. Robert Siodmak's *The Dark Mirror* (1946) cast her as identical twins – one good and one evil, of course. De Havilland's twist was to make the evil one sweet and charming; her bubbly delivery of psychopathic answers to a Rorschach test is the highlight of the film.

For Anatole Litvak at 20th Century Fox she made *The Snake Pit* (1948), her personal favourite, a drama about a psychiatric patient who descends through the worst parts of a 1948 asylum. Her interest was spurred by her wartime hospital visits. "Knowing that the mental wards of military hospitals were filled with traumatised soldiers," she said, "I felt that it was imperative that their families understood their affliction." She plays a woman tormented by the guilt from a certain childhood experience, and while the Freudian psychology is pat, her performance is sensitive and insightful. No one who sees her bewildered terror when she's sent to the "permanent" ward of the title will ever forget it. Despite the grim subject matter, the movie was a major hit, and it is de Havilland's all the way.





Most older actresses lose out in the battle to find deep, meaningful roles because of Hollywood's ingrained resistance – at least for now




For those few years, she went from triumph to triumph with scarcely a pause. She won another Oscar in 1950, this time for the previous year's *The Heiress*, the William Wyler-directed version of a play based on Henry James's *Washington Square*. A few critics complained that even with Hollywood's idea of homeliness – no lipstick, unplucked brows, bad hair – de Havilland was too beautiful to play plain, sheltered Catherine Sloper. That turned out to be a quibble; Catherine is a superb performance, a naturally affectionate woman whose personality is warped by a manipulative suitor (Montgomery Clift) and a cold, unloving father (Ralph Richardson).

She had married novelist Marcus Goodrich in 1946, had a son, Benjamin, after *The Heiress* wrapped, and took some time off. She starred on Broadway in a star-crossed version of *Romeo and Juliet* and a rather more successful production of George Bernard Shaw's *Candida*. The 1950s brought divorce from Goodrich, a new marriage to *Paris Match* editor Pierre Galante and a permanent move to Paris, as well as a daughter, Gisele, born in 1956. She still sought out challenging work, but it came less frequently, as with *My Cousin Rachel* (1952), which found her starring opposite Richard Burton in his screen debut. The underrated gothic mystery, based on a Daphne du Maurier novel, casts de Havilland in a fascinating role as a woman who may or may not be a murderer. Unlike many did-she-or-didn't-she dramas, de Havilland's *Rachel* remains a mystery to the end.

Savvy enough to know she had a case in 1943 ("I knew I would win"), de Havilland was also wise enough to see

what had happened to Hollywood; television had arrived, the number of productions had plummeted. "A whole civilisation was dying, and I knew that whatever replaced it would not be its equal," she told the film historian Robert Osborne in an interview. With exceptions such as Guy Green's exquisite *Light in the Piazza* (1961), the 1960s showed she wasn't wrong. *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964) is a decent entry in the hagsploitation genre, but Miriam is hardly the kind of role de Havilland once fought for. To watch the ghastly *Lady in a Cage* (1963) is to feel fury at whoever thought this was the way to treat her. Most older actresses lose out in the battle to find deep, meaningful roles because of Hollywood's ingrained resistance – at least for now.

She continued to work all the way up to 1988, and her life has been full, her attitude joyous. Now, as she turns 100 on 1 July, de Havilland is the last of the great pre-World War II Hollywood stars; her contemporary Kirk Douglas got a much later start. One by one, the others have died, including her sister Joan Fontaine in 2013. De Havilland remains, still willing to be photographed, still sharing her memories, whether it's the films with Flynn, *Gone with the Wind* for the umpteenth time, or the later parts she politely prefers. How lucky we are. As Errol Flynn tells her in *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941), "Walking through life with you, ma'am, has been a very gracious thing." 



A season of 12 films, 'Olivia de Havilland: The Woman Who Changed Hollywood', runs throughout July at BFI Southbank, London

LADY WITH THE LAMP
(Clockwise from top left) De Havilland with Joseph Cotten in *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964), as Catherine Sloper in *The Heiress* (1949), and with Richard Burton in *My Cousin Rachel* (1952)

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IN CINEMAS JUNE 10 | ON DIGITAL JUNE 13 | ON DVD & BLU-RAY JUNE 27



JUNGLE FEVER

Inverting the perspective of 'Heart of Darkness'-style dramas to explore the ravages of colonialism from the viewpoint of the indigenous population, Colombian director Ciro Guerra's 'Embrace of the Serpent' is a dream-like examination of an Amazonian shaman leading two Western explorers into the jungle during the first half of the 20th century

By Tom Graham

"In this moment, it is not possible for me to know, dear reader, if the infinite jungle has started on me the process that has taken many others that have ventured into these lands, to complete and irremediable insanity... all I know is that, like all those who have shed the thick veil that blinded them, when I came back to my senses, I had become another man."

The man transformed was Theodor Koch-Grünberg, a German ethnologist who ventured into the Amazon at the turn of the 20th century. His journals, along with those of the American biologist Richard Evans Schultes who followed in his footsteps 30 years later, are what inspired Ciro Guerra's *Embrace of the Serpent* – the Colombian director's third feature following *The Wandering Shallows* (2004), a darkly comic portrait of life in modern-day Colombia, and *The Wind Journeys*, a bittersweet tale of an ageing accordionist that screened in Un Certain Regard at Cannes in 2009.

In Guerra's Oscar-nominated film, the explorers Théo and Evan are loosely based on their namesakes. Théo is mortally ill and racing to find the yakruna, a sacred plant he hopes may save him. Evan is soul-sick and cannot dream, but hopes the plant may teach him. Both are guided by Karamakate, an Amazonian shaman who is probably the last survivor of his tribe. As a virile youth, he guides Théo in the slender hope of finding other members of his tribe; 30 years later, a broken man, he believes he has lost his true self and become his *chul-lachaqui* – a figure in Amazonian mythology which is a hollow, ghost-like replica of a person – looking to find what's left of himself.

Guerra and I met in Bogotá to discuss his film, ahead of its UK release on 10 June.

Tom Graham: You draw on the writings of Theodor Koch-Grünberg and Richard Evans Schultes, but your film is a work of fiction. Is there a responsibility and a limit to how much you can fictionalise such documents?

Ciro Guerra: The decision to fictionalise most of it was because of our responsibility to the indigenous people. They specifically asked us not to use the names of their plants, for instance, because these things are sacred. But I soon realised that I was not looking to make an ethnographic or anthropological document. I was interested in the truth behind all that: the relationship which these people have with the plants and the world. That's the point that comes across in the film, but the details are completely fictional. Although I've been told there are now people trying to sell yakruna.

TG: So the details are fictionalised, but are the events in the film based on true events?

CG: Only the crazier ones. Like the Western missionary they meet who has convinced the Indians he is the Messiah – that really happened, and it was much more demented than what you see in the film. A mestizo called Niceto came to the border of Colombia and Brazil at the end of the 19th century and proclaimed that he was the Messiah. He came to have around 2,000 followers and they got so out of control that the Brazilian army had to go and remove him. Then 20 years later there was another guy who claimed to be the Messiah and that time it ended in a mass suicide. Even today on the border of Colombia and Peru you can find a group of indigenous people who call themselves the 'Real Israelis of the Holocaust', although their Messiah died about five years ago. This phenomenon of Amazonian Messiahs is a very real thing.

TG: We've seen that before, in *Apocalypse Now* [1979], for example. There we have the usual narrative of the Westerner going into the jungle and losing their mind, but your film is an inversion of that.

CG: The idea that has dominated the Western jungle narrative is that the jungle drives you mad. But when you go to the jungle and spend time with the indigenous people you realise that it's not the jungle that drives you mad, but rather that madness is in the hearts of men and the jungle can release it. That's the way the indigenous people see it. So we flipped that point of view completely. Some people think we took the Messiah scene from *Apocalypse Now*, but *Apocalypse Now* took it from the real stories. However, they did not give it the Catholic twist, and that was very real in the Amazon. It was a mad syncretism of Catholicism and paganism.

TG: You've spent a lot of time in the Amazon with indigenous people. What differences did you observe between Western and indigenous modes of storytelling?

CG: I spent three and half years going to the Amazon. The film is an attempt to build a bridge between Western and Amazonian storytelling, because if you read Amazonian mythology, it has a completely different narrative logic. Animals, for instance, are a big presence: they are characters which speak and transform. Time is also non-linear. At first I wanted to make a very Amazonian narrative, but I soon realised it would be incomprehensible to other audiences. I needed to fuse the two styles of storytelling. Anthropological fact became less important; dream and imagination became central to the narrative. I did find a way to tell the story in a purely Amazonian way too, but I had to hide it. That's something very clever viewers notice about the film – all of the symbolism of the animals and what's written on the rocks.



TG: So will people from different cultures perceive this film in different ways?

CG: I have been surprised by how deeply people have understood the film. For example, when we showed it in Korea people really understood it in a very spiritual way. And in India people told me they saw connections to the story of Krishna. I'm very interested in how these myths make us come together as humans, and in the coincidences in traditional myths across the world.

TG: Can you go into the mythology of the title?

CG: In Amazonian mythology, ancestral beings were brought to earth on a gigantic anaconda that descended from the Milky Way. They landed in the ocean and went into the Amazon, stopping at human communities along the way. They taught the humans a system of rules to live with the jungle, before returning to the Milky Way. The body of the anaconda became the river, and its shed skin became the waterfalls. Before leaving they left three gifts, including the sacred plant that allows you to communicate with them. When you use the plant you go on a spiritual journey: the serpent descends again and embraces you, taking you somewhere you can see the world in a different way. And I hope the film does that to the audience.

TG: Do you think we see indigenous cultures in a different way as a result of these journals?

CG: One hundred years ago we were in the middle of an industrial revolution and nature was the enemy. Indigenous people around the world were seen as poor souls, something subhuman that needed to be rescued. These explorers essentially told the Western world that we can learn from these people, and that was revolutionary. It was then, and still is, sadly.

MYSTIC RIVER
Embrace of the Serpent (opposite), directed by Ciro Guerra (above), is loosely based on the journals of a German ethnologist who ventured into the Amazon at the turn of the 20th century and an American biologist who followed in his footsteps 30 years later



But these journals did have a huge effect on the beginnings of the counterculture, which eventually became today's ecological movement. William Burroughs, for example, came to Colombia to find the sacred plant they wrote about. All the writers of the Beat generation were influenced by these journals. They helped make a big cultural shift: even thinking about an ecological conscience 100 years ago was completely ridiculous.

TG: Yet indigenous cultures are in greater danger than ever. Why is it important these cultures are preserved?

CG: We need to be aware that there is not just one way to be human. Everything we take for granted is as much of a tale, as much fiction and imagination, as what they take for granted. Take psychoanalysis: we disguise it as science and present it as facts. On the other hand, the way indigenous people understand time, for example, is very similar to the way particle physicists understand time. They don't see it as this linearity, they see it as simultaneous multiplicity. This way in which traditional knowledge and the most advanced science are coming together tells you there is something we used to know, and perhaps science is the process of trying to know it again. Patricio Guzmán makes this point in his film *The Pearl Button* (2015): indigenous people look at the stars and see their ancestors, and what are we looking for with our telescopes? We are trying to find out where we come from: we are looking for our ancestors.

TG: These cultures are still being extinguished though. Can cinema help preserve them?

CG: Yes, but people sometimes confuse film with fact, which of course it's not. That puts a big responsibility in the hands of the director. When you frame something with the camera you are selecting a bit of the truth, and it's the same when you edit. Objective truth is something that cannot be achieved through film, so people shouldn't look to films for scientific truth. The truth they tell us is different: they help us understand the spirit of a time, and the human condition.

TG: The film shows the meeting of two cultures: the Western and the indigenous. As a Colombian, where do you feel you fit within that framework?

CG: We Latin Americans are the result of this violent clash. We have this dual heritage, but the indigenous heritage is one we have denied. For me, this film was a personal process of rediscovering it and giving it value, because we have grown up in a culture that tells us that everything good comes from the United States and Europe. There are many people here who feel ashamed about our indigenous heritage, but I don't think it's a handicap – I think it's a blessing. In many ways, this is a film about the origin of Colombia.

TG: Have indigenous people seen the film? How did they respond to it?

CG: It was a wonderful experience. In Vaupés [in south-east Colombia] we managed to turn a *maloca*, a traditional longhouse, into a cinema for a night. We expected 500 people, and 2,000 came. Some walked for two days to see the film. For them, the most impressive part was to hear their languages spoken on screen. Many of them have cellphones, some of them have TV, but to see their cultures on film meant a great deal to them.

TG: In our culture, we've had time to develop a tolerance to the increasing realism of cinema. I thought it might have




Everything we take for granted is as much of a tale, as much fiction and imagination, as what indigenous cultures take for granted

been powerful, even terrifying, for some of the indigenous people to be thrown in at the deep end with your film.

CG: I find virtual reality terrifying. When I first used it, I understood what people felt when they saw the Lumière's film of the train [in 1895]. But the indigenous people have a way to approach these new things in which they don't take anything seriously. I was thinking about this when we brought the actors [who played the young and old Karamakate] to Cannes and to the Oscars, but they just don't take those aspects of the Western world seriously. They know what's important in life, and the rest is just fun.

TG: The young and old Karamakate are absolutely integral to the film. How did you cast them?

CG: When we chose to shoot in Vaupés, we started going out in the region and inviting people to be a part of the film. One day the casting director went to a village and explained the project. Everyone was very enthusiastic and had their picture taken, apart from this one guy. Eventually his friends and family convinced him, but he said he would only do it if he could be the star of the film. And when we saw his picture we knew this was the young Karamakate. We didn't see anyone else quite like him: he's like an ancient warrior-shaman.

Then we had to find the older Karamakate. I spoke to many shamans, but they are just on a completely different wavelength. Asking them to be in the film would have been impossible. So I started looking at everything that has been shot in the Colombian Amazon over the years, which is very little. And I saw a short film done 25 years ago in Leticia [in the far south of Colombia] by the Ministry of Education. There was a guy in it for two minutes, and he was so impressive. I began asking around and tracked him down. The moment he opened the door I realised this film could be made. We started talking and his backstory was unbelievable because he is one of the last Ocaina people – there are only 16 of them left. During his childhood he was displaced by rubber exploitation as well. It was clear that it had to be him. 



Embrace of the Serpent is released in UK cinemas on 10 June and is reviewed on page 75

THE MOUTH OF MADNESS
The idea that has dominated Western jungle narratives is that the jungle drives people mad, but *Embrace of the Serpent* (above) follows the beliefs of indigenous communities who think that the jungle simply releases the madness that lives in the hearts of men

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EYES ON THE PRIZE
Russell Crowe and Ryan Gosling in Shane Black's *The Nice Guys*, which evokes the private detective movies and TV shows of the 1960s and 70s, as well as Black's own scripts from the 80s and 90s, such as *Lethal Weapon* and *The Last Boy Scout*

THE ROAD



Following in a long tradition of Hollywood buddy movies, Shane Black's 'The Nice Guys' has enormous fun with its tale of a pair of bickering private eyes on the trail of a missing woman through the smog-filled mean streets of late 70s Los Angeles

By Kim Newman

Shane Black's *The Nice Guys* is two types of double throwback. It evokes the private detective movies (and TV shows) of the late 1960s and early 70s which revived and put a contemporary spin on the Hammett-Chandler-Bogart gumshoe of the 1930s and 40s. It also grows out of Black's run of 1980s and 90s scripts, which drew on the Hollywood buddy movie (and TV show) format of the 1960s and 70s. With all this going on, plus the need to burnish the star personas of Russell Crowe and Ryan Gosling, it's no wonder there isn't much room to look forward – though an audience's knowledge of how American industrial history has declined since 1977 adds a bitter irony to the payoff, even if the film does manage to be nostalgic for the haze of killing smog which used to hang permanently over Los Angeles.

The private eye, like the drifting cowboy, is an archetype of American loner hero – often betrayed by his few friends, wary in his relationship with the cops who are a necessary intrusion into his world, fiercely loyal to clients who are usually lying to him, and canny enough to spot a duplicitous dame even if they are briefly blindsided by them. Hammett's Sam Spade won't take a fall for anyone and even sends his love interest to prison on a point of honour. Chandler's Philip Marlowe walks down those mean streets alone and unafraid, and comes home – usually to an office, not an apartment – to a bottle and a chess problem. Both *The Nice Guys* and Black's previous film *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005) credit Brett Halliday, a prolific vintage crime writer, as inspiration, though Black admits he was as taken with the covers of Halliday's paperbacks as with the plots. Halliday's PI Mike Shayne made it to the screen before Bogart got his licence as Spade or Marlowe, played by Lloyd Nolan in a series starting with *Michael Shayne: Private Detective* (1940).

The image of Bogart in a trenchcoat remained strong – a poster on walls in student flats, hippie squats, French cineaste hang-outs and as inspirational decor for other screen heroes (Michael Caine in *Billion Dollar Brain*, 1967) – but 1970s private eyes knew they came up short set against him. Gumshoes still got beaten up – it was a running joke on *The Rockford Files* (1974-80) that the hero (James Garner) took a beating every week – but they didn't enjoy it the way the masochist heroes of the 1940s did. In *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), Dick Powell's Marlowe talks about being beaten unconscious as if he were having an opium dream ("a black pool opened up and I dived in"). When J.J. Gittes (Jack Nicholson) gets his nose slit in *Chinatown* (1974), he has to spend the rest of the film with a blob of plaster on his face, wincing

as he picks at the stitches. Like grizzled western heroes in films about the closing of the frontier, the 1970s private eye was a self-conscious anachronism – either elderly (Robert Mitchum playing Marlowe 20 years too late in *Farewell, My Lovely*, 1975; Art Carney in *The Late Show*, 1977) or men out of time (Elliott Gould's Marlowe in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, 1973; Gene Hackman's Harry Mosby in Arthur Penn's *Night Moves*, 1975). *The Nice Guys*, which Black co-wrote with Anthony Bagarozzi, taps into this decade-specific vibe in a less immersive way than Paul Thomas Anderson's *Inherent Vice* (2014) – but audiences are marginally more likely to come out of the movie thinking they understand the solution to the case, though the mystery is (as often) essentially beside the point.

Los Angeles, 1977. Widowed, hard-drinking single dad Holland March (Ryan Gosling) is a licensed investigator who takes cases from seniors who are likely to have forgotten their missing husband is in an urn on the mantelpiece. Bulky, professional (but unlicensed) fixer Jackson Healy (Russell Crowe) doesn't solve mysteries but delivers messages – using a knuckle-duster on a dealer who's hitting on a schoolgirl, and breaking March's arm to get him off the trail of keen-to-be-scarce student activist Amelia (Margaret Qualley). Realising his client is in danger, the surprisingly ethical Healy hooks up with March, who has an externalised conscience in the form of his 13-year-old daughter Holly (Angourie Rice). The awkward team delve into a case which involves a hardbitten DA (Kim Basinger), an investigation into the causes of smog, a porno movie whose cast and crew are dying off and a couple of inept hitmen (Keith David, Beau Knapp) who are succeeded on the job by efficient killers John Boy (Matt Bomer) and Tally (Yaya DaCosta).

Throughout, there are nods to PI precedents, but it's also very much on the model of Black's scripts for *Lethal Weapon* (1987), *The Last Boy Scout* (1991) and *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996). The teaming of March and Healy – and Gosling and Crowe – offers bickering buddies, whose dialogue owes as much to Bing and Bob as to Bogey. They even have duelling voiceover narrations. Private eye buddies are rare, though Robert Culp's underrated *Hickey & Boggs* (1972), scripted by Walter Hill, is an exception. Typically, a private eye's partner is a murder victim who needs to be avenged. Teamings of male stars of equal magnitude were once rare outside comedy, and the shadows of Laurel and Hardy, Hope and Crosby, Abbott and Costello and Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau as the 'odd couple', hang over the cycle of serio-comic films about prickly male friendship that ran from Paul Newman and Robert Redford in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) to Clint Eastwood and Burt Reynolds in *City Heat* (1984). If Black's plots and settings are steeped in pulp paperback and neo-noir, the heart of his cinema is in the two-big-male-names school of the 1970s, which yielded partnerships such as Redford and George Segal in *The Hot Rock* (1972), James Caan and Alan Arkin as *Freebie and the Bean* (1974), Redford and Newman in *The Sting* (1973) and Paul Michael Glaser and David Soul as *Starsky and Hutch* (1975-79). Female buddy movies exist – Michael Pressman's *The Great Texas Dynamite Chase* (1976) is a sex-switch drive-in take on *Butch Cassidy* with Claudia Jennings and Jocelyn Jones as Newman and Redford and Johnny Crawford as Katharine Ross; and connois-

These are stories of pals who pull capers or catch crooks, but mostly who enjoy each other's company. When friends fight, it's sometimes painful but all in good fun, with only the slightest homoerotic edge

seurs should look up Annie Potts and Kim Darby in the TV movie *Flatbed Annie & Sweetiepie: Lady Truckers* (1979) and Diane Lane and Amanda Plummer in the western *Cattle Annie and Little Britches* (1980) – but big female movie stars are more drawn to the lifelong-friendship-through-tragedy approach of *The Turning Point* (1977), *Julia* (1977) and *Beaches* (1988) than the high-jinks-on-the-run mode of *Thelma & Louise* (1991).

These are stories of pals who pull capers or catch crooks – it doesn't much matter which side of the law they're on – but mostly who enjoy each other's company. When friends fight, it's sometimes painful but all in good fun, with only the slightest homoerotic edge. There are literary precedents – Huck and Tom, even Holmes and Watson – but the 70s was an era when male friendship could be celebrated and idealised... which, outside the Black oeuvre, it seldom is in this century. Contemporary films pit former fast friends – the Lone Ranger and Tonto, Batman and Superman, Iron Man and Captain America – against each other as if it were inconceivable that men could be anything other than competitors or enemies. As ever, Robert Altman saw the underside first. *MASH* (1969) is among the most influential 'irresponsible pals' movies, and Donald Sutherland and Elliott Gould shamble charmingly through it like dropout versions of Newman and Redford, but the director's later *California Split* (1974) is the least indulgent buddy movie. Here, banter between gamblers Elliott Gould and George Segal is part of a co-dependence that requires each friend to enable the other's compulsive behaviour. Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1973) took it further, arguing against the buddy system. By sticking with the irresponsible Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro), Charlie (Harvey Keitel) ruins every chance he has. By contrast, when the partners shoot each other at the end of *The Sting*, it's just one more con and they're wiping off fake blood and making up for the fadeout.

IT TAKES TWO

On his rise to prominence as the master of the presold spec script, Black hit on the buddy format he has stuck with. Usually, a loner is teamed with a family guy – one learns responsibility (sort of) and the other unbends (a little). March's relationship with his intrepid daughter also recalls a rash of irresponsible grown-up/smart tyke movies from the 80s and 90s about which few will feel

GOING FOR BROKE George Segal and Elliott Gould in Robert Altman's *California Split* (1974), one of the least indulgent buddy movies, which follows the exploits of a pair of compulsive gamblers






nostalgic (*Curly Sue*, *My Girl*, etc; the private eye version was *V.I. Warshawski*, 1991). For all the lava-lamp lighting and 70s soundtrack, *The Nice Guys* is all 80s-90s Black, composed of equal parts smarts and mush, with a streak of flip vicious bravado. The opening sequence has a little kid (Ty Simpkins) sneaking a copy of a nudie magazine and ogling Misty Mountains (Murielle Telio), only for a runaway car to crash through his hillside house and spill out the bleeding, dying nude of his dreams – whom he decorously covers with his jacket, after the camera has panned over her nakedness. There's almost a running gag about attractive women being casually murdered – a neighbour gunned down as a wild shot goes through a window – or shown up as exceptionally dim (or evil). Holly is allowed to be an exception, but the film even has a dim view of sassy 13-year-olds – who are more likely to shack up with drug dealers than do their homework. The serious relationship is between March and Healy.

The spark between co-stars is a Black speciality. In *Lethal Weapon*, crazy cop Riggs (Mel Gibson) – another widower – and domesticated Murtaugh (Danny Glover) balance each other out, with Riggs semi-adopted by a family who are repeatedly endangered by the heat generated by his antics. *The Last Boy Scout* has divorced detective Joe Hallenbeck (Bruce Willis) teamed with disgraced football player Jimmy Dix (Damon Wayans) and continually winking at the audience to show he is well aware of the generic nature of his adventure but happy enough that it's at least entertaining. When a menacing figure (Taylor Neron) looms up and asks for an introduction, Joe deadpans, "Who gives a fuck? You're the bad guy, right?" Don't bother trying to follow the plot, because it's not the point. *The Long Kiss Goodnight* experiments with a female lead

(Geena Davis) and a partner (Samuel L. Jackson) who takes a fatherly interest in her – just as Healy is positioned to be a father figure to the irresponsible March. *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* teams up Harry (Robert Downey Jr), a con man posing as an actor, with Parry (Val Kilmer), a gay private eye. In every case, the more serious partner makes the wild card a nicer person, but not so much nicer that they give up on the high jinks that make them watchable.

Like most Black movies, *The Nice Guys* is enormous fun. It's not exactly guilt-free and doesn't try to be more than a hugely entertaining runaround with bad-taste gags. *Inherent Vice* inhabits the uneasy, disorienting world of 1970s cinema, but Black prefers that the backdrop be just a backdrop. It's all about squabbling, joshing and the creation of an extended oddball family – smart-mouth kids show up in tons of Black scripts too, from *The Monster Squad* (1987) on – where two men (usually) can be functional non-sexual partners. Crowe, ballooning as if he were turning into John Goodman, and Gosling, downplaying his usual cool but sticking with wounded sensitivity, are newcomers to the territory. In contrast to previous Black teams, *The Nice Guys* offers two straight white dudes (the two killer couples in the movie are black-and-white teams). Just as a standard romcom goes from meet cute to coupledness via crises and break-ups, *The Nice Guys* traces a relationship that begins with misunderstanding and pain and winds up with a personal and professional commitment. Only here, the putting aside of irresponsibility – if not the urge for mutual adventure – is symbolised not by a marriage licence but a PI's licence as March and Healy Investigations opens for business. 

 ***The Nice Guys* is out now in UK cinemas and is reviewed on page 86**

BUDDY MINDED
One of the specialties of Black's screenplays is the spark he creates between his co-stars, including (clockwise from top left) Val Kilmer and Robert Downey Jr in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005), to Damon Wayans and Bruce Willis in *The Last Boy Scout* (1991), Geena Davis and Samuel L. Jackson in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) and Danny Glover and Mel Gibson in *Lethal Weapon* (1987)

OPINION

NETWORKED REALITIES

Digital technology has undermined the whole idea that the camera can capture reality – and revitalised documentary film

By Erika Balsom

It is tempting to write the history of documentary cinema as a succession of encounters with new technologies. While many other factors have shaped documentary over its long and impure history – notably, progressive social movements and institutional formations – technological change plays a special role in catalysing paradigm shifts. In the 1960s, the advent of devices such as the Nagra tape recorder, the Arriflex camera, and the Portapak video recording system revolutionised the field and facilitated an interest in direct observation that decisively broke with earlier traditions. More recently, digitisation has turned documentary upside down once more. But what are the results?

In the 1990s, widespread digitisation sparked anxieties that we were entering an age of untrustworthy images, simulations with no grounding in reality. The spectre of manipulation loomed over the grid of pixels that constitutes every digital picture. Meanwhile, the delight in pastiche, the waning of historicity and the critique of concepts such as ‘truth’ that are integral to postmodernism suggested a realignment of epistemological foundations.

It was easy to feel that documentary faced an uncertain future. Linda Williams’s landmark 1993 article ‘Mirrors Without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary’ saw the way out of such pessimism. She took stock of prevailing anxieties and acknowledged that a sea change was occurring. Yet instead of deeming it a crisis, she insisted on the persistence and complexity of a form of ‘new documentary’ that grappled with these evolving techno-cultural conditions and formulated critical responses to them. In films such as Errol Morris’s *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), she saw a commitment to a formally innovative documentary cinema, which retreated from previous ideals of objectivity and transparency in favour of a reflexive examination of contingent and relative truths.

More than 20 years later, the sense of digitisation as threat has not receded. Much popular cinema has moved away from the primacy of lens-based capture, foregoing the registration of real bodies in real spaces. There’s nothing special about special effects any more; CGI and compositing are everywhere. But Williams was right: beyond – and in opposition to – such media spheres, documentary is flourishing, as artists and filmmakers extend and contest this tradition in the light of contemporary conditions. Digitisation has proved a boon as well as a threat, revitalising documentary as the Nagra, Arriflex, and Portapak did. Beyond providing new tools for production, digital technologies have transformed both our understanding of what

constitutes reality and our relationship to the fabrication and circulation of images – significant issues that accord documentary a new urgency as a means through which such questions might be addressed. After all, when so many CGI worlds blind us to the frailty and complexity of *our* world – precisely at a moment of ecological, financial and humanitarian crisis – making and watching documentary films is an ethical imperative.

But where are these new documentary practices? Whereas Williams’s interest lay in widely accessible feature films, recent years have seen an institutional shift in the location of vanguard nonfiction filmmaking, with many practitioners engaging with documentary outside industrial channels of film distribution, as the moving image increased its presence in contemporary art from the 1990s onward. These works are not likely to show up on DVD or on-demand platforms, and few will get theatrical runs. They inhabit spaces that speak to the increasing hybridisation of the worlds of art and film: festivals such as CPH:DOX in Copenhagen, showcases such as the Film Society of Lincoln Center’s Art of the Real series, events like the Haus der Kulturen der Welt’s Berlin Documentary

When CGI worlds blind us to the frailty of our world, making and watching documentary films is an ethical imperative



Shot for shot: In *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012) Rabih Mroué analyses videos from Syria in which people are shot while filming a sniper with their phones

Forum, one-off screenings put on by organisations like LUX, and numerous temporary exhibitions positioned in the grey zone between black box and white cube. The art context has provided economic and aesthetic possibilities for forms of nonfiction filmmaking that in decades past would have existed outside it. It is notable, for example, that established filmmakers such as Chantal Akerman, Harun Farocki and Chris Marker all produced installations commissioned by art institutions late in their careers, while younger figures such as Amar Kanwar and Kutlug Ataman began by making work for a theatrical context in the 1990s before quickly turning to the multiple-projection formats possible in art spaces, where they received considerably greater exposure and acclaim. Curatorial projects also point to the recuperation of the history of experimental documentary into the gallery: Marker, Farocki and Alexander Kluge all appeared in the 2015 Venice Biennale, while at Raven Row in London Dan Kidner's winter 2015–16 exhibition 'The Inoperative Community' displayed some 50 hours of material, much of it drawn from the history of radical nonfiction filmmaking in the long 1970s.

While more conventional forms of documentary remain strong, and are perhaps more visible than ever, the most notable development in 21st-century documentary has been the efflorescence of experimental practices within these changed institutional parameters. Contemporary art must be getting dizzy from the 'turns' it has recently gone through (educational, curatorial, cinematic), but the 'documentary turn' is prominent among them, signalling a return of the real after its bracketing in discourses of modernist medium specificity and postmodernist pastiche. In both of these paradigms, images pivot away from the messy intractability of the real. Modernist doctrine holds that the image should refer back to the materiality of the medium, while postmodernism sees images as referring to other images, as if in a hall of mirrors. The contemporary interest in documentary departs sharply from both, as images are first and foremost understood according to their relation to the world. But this should not be confused with a belief in the transparency of representation. As the film scholar Evgenia Giannouri puts it, this expanded field of documentary is "plural and subversive, partaking at the same time of both artifice and authenticity, and acting under the double pulse of aesthetics and ethics".

Whether in Ben Rivers's celluloid portraits or Basma Alsharif's dreamy probing of Palestinian identity, in Vincent Meessen's essayistic histories of colonialism or Hito Steyerl's playful hyperlinking, in Wang Bing's quiet epics or Luke Fowler's archive fever, one confronts a diverse field of practice that is far from reducible to a single set of concerns or aesthetic techniques. Still, these very different artists do come together in taking up a position far away from the discursive sobriety that in 1991 the scholar Bill Nichols deemed characteristic of documentary film. Theirs is not a politics based solely on content. Rather, they take form seriously and insist on reflexively interrogating



Park life: J.P. Sniadecki and Libbie D. Cohn's *People's Park* (2012) was shot in Chengdu in China

the means by which visible evidence is created, presented and apprehended. Positing the relationship between representation and reality as an open question, they join fiction and documentary together in uncertain combinations or, at the very least, foreground the impossibility of fully or neutrally capturing the real without remainder or metamorphosis.

For a number of artists, the question of form is deeply tied to digital media technologies. Many accounts of the documentary turn in contemporary art have focused on its relationship to the implosion of modernism and the explosion of biennales around the world. These factors are crucial, but it is also necessary to take account of the extent to which many practices of recent years have engaged with the specificity of digital images, whether their aesthetic affordances and limitations, their ecologies of circulation, or as part of a meta-reflection on their role as 21st-century documents. In so doing, they push back against both the prevalent associations of digital imaging with simulation and unreality and the prevailing style of 'post-internet art' and its affirmative, depoliticised stance. To give a few examples: in *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012), Rabi Mroué analyses what he calls 'double shooting' videos from Syria – occurring when someone films a sniper with a mobile phone, only to be shot while filming; in *People's Park* (2012), J.P. Sniadecki and Libbie D. Cohn choreograph a 78-minute tracking shot through a park in Chengdu, China, a feat impossible with

photochemical film; and in the controversial *of the North* (2015), Dominic Gagnon compiles amateur videos posted online to create a portrait of how representations of Canada's Inuit population circulate in networked culture. In these three works, one can plainly see how artists have engaged with new media not out of technophilia but rather in an attempt to grapple with notions such as globalisation, war, oppression, self-representation and resistance – and to insist that today such terms may not be thought of outside their intersections with technological mediation.

The impact of the digital can also be glimpsed further afield, in areas of experimental documentary where one might not initially expect it. In artists' films that insist on the primacy of capture – the work of Rivers and Wang, for instance – one can discern a reaction formation, conscious or not, to the groundless animations of CGI. As the critic Claire Bishop has suggested, the 'operational logic' proper to digital culture can pervade media forms that may at first glance have nothing to do with it. In this regard, it is fascinating to consider the recent vogue for the essay film, which depends on a network logic of linking together disparate materials – an activity all too familiar from hours spent online. While it is easy to understand such a formal operation as part of the cinematic lineage of montage, in its horizontality, heterogeneity and obsession with forging unlikely connections, the contemporary incarnation of the essay film has distinct parallels with digital culture that must not be overlooked.

It cannot be said enough: these contemporary tendencies are not altogether new; documentary didn't need artists to teach it reflexivity and creativity. The documentary tradition in cinema has always been one of generative contamination, going back to the reenactments of *Nanook of the North* (1922). John Grierson defined documentary as the "creative treatment of actuality", but the desired balance between creativity and actuality has been understood differently across the many contexts in which nonfiction filmmaking has thrived. Today, artists working with documentary continue to negotiate these contradictions within a new institutional landscape, producing in the process cogent reflections on our networked realities. 📺



Dominic Gagnon's *of the North* (2015)

SMOKE SIGNALS



Cue the music: Chang Chen and Shu Qi in the 1966 segment of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Three Times* (2005)

In film after film, The Platters' classic version of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' is a reminder – mordant or romantic – that love is blind

By Sam Davies

The final scenes of Andrew Haigh's *45 Years* (2015) depict an anniversary party, and the 45 chosen by the couple for their first dance is the same as at their wedding: The Platters' 1958 recording of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' – a sublime slow-burner, with a melody that rises and falls and builds to a last shattering crescendo. Close attention to the lyrics suggests the song was never the happiest choice to inaugurate a lifelong union, though. New love blinds itself: "When your heart's on fire/ Smoke gets in your eyes." And the narrator's blind faith is soon dead: "Now, laughing friends deride/ Tears I cannot hide... When a lovely flame dies/ Smoke gets in your eyes." And yet the music is so gorgeous: a piano and harp arpeggiate like organised raindrops, clouds of strings drift and deliquesce around Tony Williams's lead vocal and the group's honeyed backing.

In the film, as the lights dim and Geoff (Tom Courtenay) and Kate (Charlotte Rampling) take to the floor, we see the smoke finally clearing from Kate's eyes. Her refusal to put up any longer with Geoff's omissions, deceptions and tearful evasions is expressed in minute movements: the slight distance she introduces as Geoff tries to draw her into his embrace, a refusal to reciprocate his joky mugging along with Williams's emoting, the hand she pulls too hastily from his grasp as the song ends.

The song was written in 1933 by Otto Harbach and Jerome Kern for the Broadway musical *Roberta* and made its screen debut, sung by Irene Dunne, in the 1935 film version. It became an instant standard, recorded by Nat King Cole, Eartha Kitt, Tommy Dorsey, Peggy Lee, Sarah Vaughan, Dinah Washington, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and many more. Other versions appear on film: a blandly forgettable take by the Jerry Garcia Band plays out over the credits of Wayne Wang's 1994 *Smoke* (in which, in a slightly uncanny foreshadowing of a key plot-point in *45 Years*, William Hurt's character recounts an anecdote about a son finding his long-missing father's body, perfectly preserved in a glacier). Still, it's The Platters' version, melting the stiffness

The Platters' version has become a cinematic refrain, its charge adjusted by context, yet always carrying its own dark disclosures



Margit Carstensen as Petra von Kant

of the Dunne original with its gliding doo-wop transitions, that has become a kind of cinematic refrain, returned to by director after director, decade after decade, its precise emotional charge adjusted by context, yet always carrying into the heart of each film its own dark disclosures.

In François Ozon's *5x2* (2004), we see another elderly couple dancing to 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'. Marion (Valéria Bruni-Tedeschi) has just married, but her new husband has passed out, and she wanders through the hotel to find her parents are the last dancers left on the floor. The contrast is clear: their marriage has endured, but Marion's – we already know, due to Ozon's chronological shuffling of the story's chapters – is doomed to end in bitterness and a painfully depicted final fling which descends into sexual assault. Derek Cianfrance may never have seen *5x2*, but in his *Blue Valentine* (2010) – which uses a shuffled chronology to examine the descent into mutual hatred of another couple – 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' not only features, it virtually shares a timestamp with *5x2*, appearing at 57 minutes in both films. Dean (Ryan Gosling) and Cindy (Michelle Williams) are attempting to rekindle their dying marriage with a romantic weekend break. Like the before and after of the song, Dean and Cindy live in different timeframes: Cindy is a grown-up, Dean eats cereal straight off the tabletop with his daughter, and cracks a beer on the way to work at 8am. The Platters soundtrack the drunken haze in which a play-fight veers towards the all too real, providing a background commentary that pushes past mordant towards cruel.

'Smoke...' plays not once but twice in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Three Times* (2005): it's the opening number, scoring a leisurely sequence in which

young people play snooker in a lounge in Kaohsiung City; it plays again as Chen Chang's military draftee goes in search of snooker-hall girl Shu Qi. Where Haigh and Cianfrance bring out the bleakness of the lyric, leaving the song not so much bitter-sweet as bitter-bitter, Hou lets the glamour of its arrangement take over and colour the scene, leaving it open to the audience to judge whether their romance will last. But 'Smoke...' had already left its mark on the Taiwanese new wave two decades earlier, in Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers* (1986). We watch a mother cue the record, and all other sound is muted as we see in montage a moment of tenderness with her off-the-rails daughter, while elsewhere in the city an argument between a young couple detonates silently. Where *Three Times* has a high-fidelity version as immaculate as Hou's photography, Yang uses a well-worn vinyl copy, which adds ambient ember-crackle but also distorts so warmly that the peaks of Tony Williams's delivery seem to scorch through the fabric of the film.

In the classic text for pop nostalgia in film, George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' is nearly lost, a drop in the amber ocean of 50s and 60s hits. Another slow dance, another break-up, and young love cut off in its prime (like the song itself, cut off by Lucas in the middle eight). We eavesdrop as class president Steve (Ron Howard) and cheerleading captain Laurie (Cindy Williams) shuffle across the gym floor, Laurie dismantling Steve's posturing as the school admires the dream couple.

But the first use of The Platters' version was German (as were Jerome Kern's émigré parents): "Do you like this kind of music? They're records from my youth. They either make me sad or really happy. It depends." The lines could be describing *American Graffiti*, but were spoken a year earlier by Margit Carstensen, playing the title role in Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant*. She is talking over 'In My Room' by The Walker Brothers. The entire film plays out in Petra's boudoir/studio, and Fassbinder uses only three sounds apart from the dialogue: the unceasing clatter of Petra's assistant Marlene typing up correspondence, the Walker Brothers song, and early on, The Platters singing 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'.

Like royalty, Petra stages a levee, directing Marlene from her bed, before finally getting up, dressing and – inverting the midnight norm of the torch song – wandering to her turntable to wake herself up with The Platters. As in *The Terrorizers*, we see a character drop the needle on the record. As in *45 Years*, *5x2* and *American Graffiti*, we see a couple (Petra and the mutely obedient Marlene) come together for an acutely charged slow dance. And as in *45 Years*, *Blue Valentine*, *Three Times*, and *The Terrorizers*, Fassbinder lets the song play out to the last of its 180 seconds. Perhaps in its three peaks, at the end of first refrain, the end of the bridge, and the final tumultuous pay-off, there's a cinematic shape in miniature: a three-act structure. "Someone once said beautiful things don't last," says Petra. "There's some truth in that." But The Platters' 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' goes on, each time amplified by echoes of echoes, and memories nested within memories. The name of the album for which The Platters recorded their version was *Remember When*. 📀

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

Filmmakers and exhibitors are dipping into silent film's bag of tricks to find new ways of tempting audiences



By Pamela Hutchinson

Fun as it was to imagine, the Oscars triumph of *The Artist* has not led to a full-blown silent cinema revival. While a steady flow of Blu-ray releases, books and festivals attests to a renewed interest in silent cinema, dialogue filmmaking remains, as expected, commercially dominant. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, however, filmmakers and exhibitors are flattering silent cinema in a surprising number of ways.

Any student of Hitchcock will identify silent cinema, which creates character and narrative visually rather than relying on literary devices such as dialogue, as pure cinema. As if conscious of this, a small group of directors has attempted to reveal the silent film inside sound movies.

In 2014, to illustrate his principle that "a movie should work with the sound off", Stephen Soderbergh created a full-length silent, black-and-white cut of Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and uploaded it to Vimeo. The point of the exercise, Soderbergh wrote, was to highlight the film's formal accomplishments – though he points out that it also shows how well Douglas Slocombe's colour cinematography works in monochrome, because of the "stark, high-contrast lighting style" he developed shooting black-and-white films such as *The Servant* (1963).

The Blu-ray release of Gus Van Sant's supernatural drama *Restless* (2011) included a silent version of the feature, which runs 15 minutes shorter than the original and contains alternative takes in which Van Sant asked the actors to perform as if in a non-dialogue film.

George Miller has created excitement in the blogosphere by discussing in interviews a silent black-and-white version of his spectacular *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), made by simply desaturating the film and removing everything but the score from the soundtrack. Miller has suggested it will be an extra on a forthcoming special edition release of the film. The rationale for its creation was twofold, he says: first, because the film was loosely inspired by silent westerns and slapstick films, and second, because he preferred the look of monochrome but was forced to reject it because "people reserve that for art movies now".

Without intertitles and bespoke scores, these cuts are little more than fun experiments, but it is interesting that the silent mode is a standard by which sound filmmakers judge each other's work – and a titbit to encourage fans to buy home video releases.

Exhibitors too, look back to the silent era for inspiration, screening films in ways

The silent mode is a standard by which sound filmmakers judge each other's work



Soderbergh's silent *Raiders of the Lost Ark*

that are both expensive and luxurious, as well as a century out of time. Prestigious venues such as the Royal Albert Hall in London advertise screenings of non-silent films, from *Gladiator* to *Aliens*, with live orchestral accompaniment – something subtly different from the immersive experience of watching a silent film in the same style.

The practice of showing talkies in large venues with live orchestral music echoes the splashy mode of hosting one-off screenings of classic silents with orchestra. That in turn is a descendant of one strand of silent-era exhibition practice, when big-budget pictures would be exhibited in high-ticket cinemas, with a specially commissioned orchestral score, for as long as the customers kept paying.

Elsewhere, the concept of 'live cinema' has taken off in new directions, landing in the elaborate staging techniques of Secret Cinema and Future Cinema events. At these evenings the screening is preceded by a programme of entertainment, often enhanced by live sound-effects and audience participation.

A conference at King's College London last month discussed screenings that are "augmented by synchronous live performance, site-specific location, technological intervention, social media engagement and all manner of simultaneous interactive moments". These will not suit the kind of patron who shushes fellow moviegoers for crunching their popcorn. But anyone who knows about early silent-era exhibition history will find that list familiar, bar the "social media engagement". Early film screenings were often part of a bill of entertainment, 'augmented' by live music and commentary, plus interaction via 'song films'. If you were watching in a music hall, you would expect comic turns or dancers; in a nickelodeon, a musician and a sing-song or a film explainer.

The advent of sound – that is, synchronous sound – piped through the cinema speakers transformed the cinema auditorium into a quiet, dead arena, organ interludes excepted. Now, customers sat in silence so they would not miss any of the spoken words. Moviegoers are once again enjoying the noise of the silent era, just as filmmakers are emulating its techniques. But it is frustrating that it is sound cinema, not silent, that is turning a profit from these vintage tricks. 📀

THE MODERN ANTIQUARIAN

For 60 years, the autodidact Paolo Gioli has been tinkering with and reinventing cinema, eyes fixed firmly on the past

By Nick Pinkerton

The multidisciplinary artist Paolo Gioli wants you to know he isn't "a nostalgic, a melancholic dreaming about celluloid". He expresses this concern in *Free Films Made Freely*, a video portrait included with Raro Video's new collection of his short works, three discs spanning six decades of staunchly non-commercial filmmaking practice. Because Gioli makes short non-narrative films, his work will naturally be described as 'avant-garde' – though this designation, along with the futurist-techno-utopian strain it represents, has always included a significant backward-looking, rearguard contingent. It's to this group that Gioli belongs, his protests aside. His films explore and exploit the most rudimentary material elements of their medium, though his approach differs vastly from that of, say, a neo-primitive like Andy Warhol, who appears incongruously among the motion studies of Eadweard Muybridge in Gioli's *Little Decomposed Film* (*Piccolo film decomposto*, 1986).

Gioli's practice starts at the dawn of film history, then ambles off to explore the various roads not taken. In the extensive liners accompanying the Raro set, including Gioli's explications of his own processes, David Bordwell writes that the filmmaker's work "reminds us of a period of cinema history in which the technical standards were not yet fixed." Gioli's work refers time and again to the proto-cinematic era, from the photoglyphic engravings of Fox Talbot to Muybridge's chronophotography and especially to the Lumière, whom he praises in an included print interview as "true filmmakers [who] did everything themselves" – a self-sufficiency that is essential to his practice. Gioli is an autodidact and a hands-on tinkerer, forever reinventing the wheel – even Duchamp's bicycle wheel, the key to a 1994 short. The materiality of the analogue



Filmarilyn (1992), using photos of Monroe

film strip is one of his particular preoccupations, and in a contemporary experimental film scene that has seen the sudden endangerment of celluloid, the concurrent rise of the artist-run film lab, and the overuse of phrases such as "the materiality of the analogue film strip", Gioli's longstanding dedication to a DIY philosophy makes him something of an *éminence grise*.

Gioli was born in 1942 in the city of Rovigo, near Venice, where he would later study painting at the Accademia di Belle Arti. While at school he became acquainted with the previous generations of European non-

Paolo Gioli's practice starts at the dawn of film history, then ambles off to explore the various roads not taken




L'operatore perforato (1979)

narrative filmmakers, but his real revelation came during a sojourn in the United States in 1967-68. There he was exposed to the avant-garde then being promoted by Jonas Mekas as 'the New American Cinema', met his producer and benefactor Paolo Vampa, and acquired a 16mm Paillard Bolex, the signature camera of the experimental film world, with which he returned to Italy and started in straightaway on his first movie-making endeavours.

Raro's Gioli package divides his work into various subsets – 'Found Footage', 'Animated Films' and so on – though for the most part the films themselves, with their overlapping techniques, resist such clean categorisation. The earliest works in the collection, as well as the most recent, are located under the heading of 'Cameraless Films', which includes Gioli's *Trace of Traces* (*Tracce di tracce*, 1969), created through direct manipulation of the 16mm film strip with rubber stamps, sandpaper and fingers dipped in ink, leaving behind cutaneous scuffing. (The results aren't far from what Gioli calls Stan Brakhage's "frottage of material", though he hadn't seen Brakhage's films at the time when he was working.) The 'Pinhole' section collects Gioli's moving-image experiments with home-made motion-picture cameras, such as *Film stenopeico* (1973-89), with its simple studies of floral arrangements and a woman's partially exposed body, created using a kind of *camera obscura* customised from a hollow metal tube perforated with 150 pinholes.

Gioli's stated purpose in using cameras of his own devising is "to restore to images freedom from optics and mechanics", and a programme of resistance to the standardisation and fencing-in of the frameline is one aspect of Gioli's art that unifies his many diverse avenues of experimentation. Another early film, *Commutazioni con mutazione* (*Commutations with Mutation*, 1969), comprises fragments of super 8, 16mm and 35mm film affixed to a single strip of clear 16mm leader, the mismatched formats jostling against one another and combining to create the anxious, pulsating rhythm that is also something common to much of Gioli's restless cinema. Still another subset of the collection is dedicated to flickering 'Stroboscopic' films. In one, *According to My Glass Eye* (*Secondo il mio occhio di vetro*, 1972), positive and negative counter-images seem to face off in a bisected frame. These scenes are accompanied by a backdrop of sweaty percussion not unlike that which opens the staggeringly elaborate collage *Images Disturbed by an Intense Parasite* (*Immagini disturbate da un intenso parassita*, 1970), consisting entirely of images shot from television, the lines of resolution forming a pattern of vertical corduroy-like grooves which are then interrupted by constantly transforming geometric schemata.

If I'm focusing on work from Gioli's first creative outpouring it's because of their strength as representative samples, not because the material compiled here shows a drop-off in quality. His often jittery, unstable films are united by an undiminished elbow-grease work ethic, a steadfast vision, and a singular conviction that one possible future of cinema is to be found somewhere in its past. 

PEACE INITIATIVE

Seventy years ago, the first Cannes festival after World War II unveiled a handful of classics, and pointed the way to a new world order

By Olaf Möller

The edition of the Cannes Film Festival held in September 1946 (the move to May came later) was not the first major event of its kind after the end of World War II – Locarno's inaugural edition kicked off on 29 August that year, with the Manifestazione Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica di Venezia, the Biennale's reawakening, following two days later. What set Cannes apart was the manner in which the main prize was awarded: shared among 11 films – a decision that feels like a mission statement for the post-war world.

At least three of those 11 are now canonical, even if few are aware of their Cannes award: David Lean's *Brief Encounter*, Billy Wilder's *The Lost Weekend* and Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*, all 1945 productions. Three more might still ring a bell with some: from Mexico, Emilio Fernández's visually stunning nativist melodrama *María Candelaria* (1943); from Switzerland, Leopold Lindtberg's timeless refugee epic *The Last Chance* (1945); and from France, Jean Delannoy's tense and terse Gide adaptation *Pastoral Symphony* (1946). The remaining five, despite their excellence and importance, are now barely known outside their respective film cultures: Alf Sjöberg's Swedish drama of class barrier-crossing love, *Iris and the Lieutenant* (1946); Chetan Anand's Indian expressionist variation on themes from Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, *Neecha Nagar* (1946); Friedrich Ermler's coldly composed, commanding *The Turning Point* (1945); and finally two paeans to the resistance struggle – from Czechoslovakia, Frantisek Čáp's *Men Without Wings* (1946) and, from Denmark, Bodil Ipsen and Lau Lauritzen's *Red Meadows* (1945) – the latter being also the first film (co-)directed by a woman to win top honours in a major competition.

It is telling that the film arguably most often associated with Cannes '46, René Clement's *The Battle of the Rails* (1945), was not among the main awardees (though it did win the International Jury Prize). Given the way France at that point was dealing with its collaborationist past – vengeful and unflinching – Georges Huisman's jury probably felt that featuring a local resistance drama alongside comparable works from countries that hadn't embraced their occupiers as eagerly might look... awkward. So they plumped for Delannoy's *Pastoral Symphony*, a narrative of education and enlightenment by a director who had contributed to an 'inner emigration'-style atmosphere of defiance in occupied France with films such as *Pontcarra*, *colonel d'empire* (1942) and *Eternal Love* (1943) – instead of, say, a historical people's war tale by a communist director and union activist (Louis Daquin's *Patrie*, 1946), or the story of a return, easy to read allegorically (Christian-Jaque's *Un revenant*, 1946).

Thoughts such as these have to be kept in mind when appreciating the jury's decision: while the war needed to be dealt with squarely, a



The wretched of the earth: Emilio Fernández's visually stunning melodrama *María Candelaria* (1943)

The decision to share the main prize among 11 films feels like a mission statement for the post-war world

future had to be forged as well – which at times meant celebrating the obvious and not getting mixed up in messy political ambiguities. Hence the awards for *Men Without Wings* and *Red Meadows*, two gems of modesty, grit and glory made with a wonderful feeling of urgency and dedication, stories necessary for nations to be reunited in spirit, which is what they – like *Rome*, *Open City* – set out to achieve. *The Turning Point*



Friedrich Ermler's *The Turning Point* (1945)

looks particularly curious beside this trio: they are about commoners at war in a proto-urban guerrilla manner, while it shows the army elite making decisions that might turn tides in large-scale battles. In contrast to the two other Soviet war films featured in the competition, Lev Arnshtam's partisan hagiography *Zoya* (1944) and Mikhail Romm's slave labour exposé *Girl Number 217* (1944), *Turning Point* fitted well with the way Stalin by then wanted the Great Patriotic War to be remembered: the upper echelon calmly decides the nation's fate despite its anxieties, the lower orders bravely execute their decisions. Ermler himself hated the film, probably because of the role it played in Stalin's post-war politics of images. Looked at today, *Turning Point* comes over as an existential anti-drama of seemingly endless, torturous waiting whose few scenes of combat feel unreal, almost delirious; a modernist masterpiece, no less.

The shadow of the war could also be sensed in films such as *Brief Encounter* and *Iris and the Lieutenant* – it is not hard to read between the lines of both films a hint at a common experience of those years: that of passion discovered outside the limits deemed socially appropriate. Similarly, *The Lost Weekend* invites a somewhat broader reading as an essay on substance abuse – considering how much of that had gone on in all armed forces, and how many addicts were now out on the streets all over the planet.

The one film that makes you wonder whether the jury understood how politically hot an item they were dealing with is *Neecha Nagar*. On the surface, the story of peasants rising against an abusive landlord has little to do with getting rid of the imperialists – yet does it really matter whether the exploiter is local or foreign? By the time the next Cannes Film Festival was held, two years later, the Raj was gone. The face of the world was changing. ☹

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full of characters you won't want to leave behind"
Tim Robey, The Telegraph

OUR LITTLE SISTER

A Film by
Kore-eda Hirokazu



CURZON
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★★★★★
TOTAL FILM

★★★★★
THE GUARDIAN

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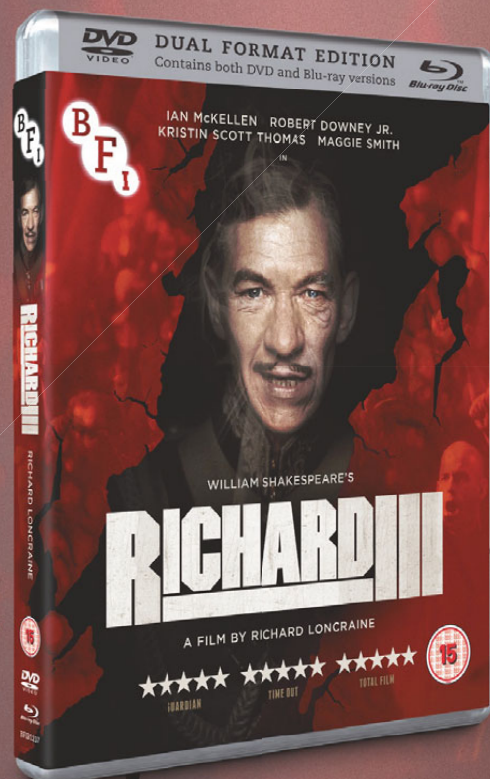
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Reviews



88 **Versus: The Life and Films of Ken Loach**

In Louise Osmond's documentary portrait, producer Tony Garnett calls Loach 'the most leftwing, subversive director this country's probably ever had'. Which may well be, but he is also one of the most mysterious



58 Films of the Month



66 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books



What lies beneath: Banlop Lomnoi and Jenjira Pongpas Widner in what could be thought of as Apichatpong Weerasethakul's answer to *The Shining*

Cemetery of Splendour

Thailand/United Kingdom/France/Malaysia/
Germany/South Korea/Mexico/USA/Norway/
The Netherlands/Hong Kong 2015
Director: Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Probably the closest Apichatpong Weerasethakul will ever come to a state-of-the-nation report on Thailand, *Cemetery of Splendour* starts in what feels like a realist mode – its reality centres on an apparently incurable sleeping sickness – and escalates at the mid-point into a kind of phantasmagoria, signalled by cyclical changes in the colour of lights. This shift from the broadly realistic into the overtly fantastical has obvious roots in the two-part structures of Apichatpong's early films, from *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000) to *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), but this time there's no sense of one part commenting on or revising the other. Here the shift serves to intensify the current of nightmare which has been there from the start. You could think of it as Apichatpong's answer to *The Shining*.

It's not accidental that the shift occurs during a visit to a cinema. Jen (Jenjira Pongpas

Widner, a central, poignantly disabled figure in Apichatpong's films and installations for the past decade) came to the north-eastern town of Khon Kaen to visit her friend Tet, a nurse, and found her tending to wards of serving soldiers who had succumbed to an epidemic of narcolepsy. She stayed on as a volunteer to help one patient who was never visited by relatives, a soldier named Itt (Banlop Lomnoi, the soldier in *Tropical Malady*). Seemingly as a direct result of her care, Itt periodically revived and was able to have conversations and meals with her before relapsing.

Once this has happened a few times, Jen ambitiously invites Itt to leave the hospital with her for a meal in the night market and a visit to the movies. They sit in a not very crowded multiplex cinema watching the trailer for a typically lurid Thai horror film (Phyungvet Phyakul's *The Iron Coffin Killer*) and then stand for the expected national anthem. (A short montage of the currently reigning King Bhumipol's good works is always played in Thai cinemas before the main feature, accompanied by the national anthem; patrons are mandated to stand.) On this occasion, though, the cinemagoers stand in darkness and silence. Apichatpong cuts to a long-

held shot of two ceiling fans as the light playing on them goes through a cycle of colour changes. We next see Itt, who has relapsed again, being carried down the escalators of the glitzy shopping mall beneath the cinema – and very slowly mix to a night shot of the hospital ward he came from. We've already seen light-tubes installed beside



Jenjira Pongpas Widner as Jen



For Apichatpong Weerasethakul, spiritual sicknesses – the mental impediments to achieving nirvana – always trump purely physical maladies

What are your hopes and dreams? Itt explains that he wants to quit the army (he's done little more than wash his general's car) to run a street-food stall; Jen's profound despair springs from learning that Itt will never recover. She ends the film fully awake and wide-eyed, aghast at her realisation that things will never get better.

Jen's trajectory is from innocence to experience – the reference to William Blake is not made in the film but is entirely appropriate – but it doesn't turn the film into a political allegory. The offscreen reality is that Thailand remains a constitutional monarchy, with a much-loved but elderly and infirm king and a looming problem of succession, but is currently governed by a military junta which seized power to suppress the political chaos ushered in by former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, now in exile. Certain human rights have been curtailed, opposition has been silenced (Apichatpong quietly alludes to the death of a real-life political prisoner in one of the entries in Itt's journal) and there are still outbreaks of shocking, murderous violence. The only direct references to military dictatorship in the film are the occasional glimpses of murals and statues of Sarit Thanarat, an army field marshal who staged a coup in 1957 and ruled with still-hated malignance; Apichatpong says he was startled to find them *in situ* in Khon Kaen, where Sarit – like the civilian Thaksin more recently – lavished money on the rural constituency to bolster his support.

This unhappy situation is not allegorised in the film but instead refracted through a story that glides naturally from realist observation to a fantastical world where long-dead Khmer kings prosecute never-ending wars in some netherworld, leeching spiritual sustenance from our present. Apichatpong's singular method is

by now familiar: he looks at present-day realities through a prism of personal and collective memories, refusing to distinguish between the everyday, dream-states and dark fantasies, the latter more often than not rooted in the history of his medium. His *modus operandi* here climaxes in the extended sequence towards the end of the film in which Keng claims to access Itt's consciousness and takes Jen on a tour of the hospital grounds.

Keng-as-Itt sees the rooms of a gorgeous palace and magnificent vistas of an unspoiled land. Jen doesn't seem to take this in but sees what's actually there: dumped garbage and debris, moralistic quips painted on signboards, sculptures of couples – corporeal and skeletal – created by the mystical Laotian artist Bunleua Sulilat for his Sala Keoku Park. (Jen and Itt are also seen in Bunleua's sculpture park in Apichatpong's recent installation piece *Fireworks (Archives)*, lately shown in Rotterdam.) The point is that both visions are true. There *are* ancient forces and battles underpinning the actions of many Thai authority-figures, and contemporary Thailand is a wasteland of consumer detritus, didactic commands and surreal incongruities. It's in this sense that the film is an op-ed commentary on 21st-century Thailand.

Cemetery of Splendour rests on Apichatpong's familiar metaphor of sickness and the drive to heal it, from treatments for Jen's damaged leg to the narcoleptic soldiers, echoed in images of a dying tree orchid and rather half-hearted mass aerobics. For Apichatpong, though, what Buddhists see as spiritual sicknesses – the mental impediments to achieving nirvana – always trump purely physical maladies, tropical or otherwise. The diagnosis here, as in several of the Korean master Jang Sunwoo's explicitly Buddhist films, is: situation critical, and probably inoperable. That's why a mood of sadness and images of mania (non-musical chairs on the bank of Khon Kaen's lake) come to dominate the film. It might be possible to alleviate some of the symptoms, perhaps with the play of coloured lights (they are, after all, a simpler and more abstract version of the movies), but it wouldn't "reach the bones". ☹

each bed, bathing the narcoleptic soldiers in azure light, an experimental psycho-therapeutic remedy for their condition. These light-tubes now also start displaying a colour-cycle: azure, pink, peppermint green, blood red. The colour-cycles dominate the entire second part of the film.

It's Jen's experiences that give the film its overall arc. The story opens with her arrival in Khon Kaen and her exploration of the makeshift hospital as she searches for the friend, nurse Tet, who has brought her to the town. The first thing established as they talk is that Tet's earlier prescription of a medicinal cream for Jen's damaged leg hasn't helped: it had superficial effects but "didn't reach the bones". Jen goes on to have interesting and illuminating conversations with various people, living and dead – the psychic Keng who recalls her past life as a boy who died falling from a tree, the librarian who is a holdover from the building's past life as a school, two Laotian princess-goddesses – but the key event during her stay is her 'adoption' of the narcoleptic soldier Itt. During his limited periods of wakefulness, Itt becomes her surrogate son. Their conversations are exactly what you'd expect from new acquaintances: where are you from? How's your competence in other Thai dialects?

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Keith Griffiths
Simon Field
Charles de Meaux
Michael Weber
Hans W. Geissendörfer
Written by
Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Director of Photography
Diego Garcia
Edited by
Lee Chatametikool
Production Designer
Akekarat Homlaor
Sound Designer
Akritchalern Kalayanamitr
Costume Designer
Phim U-mari

©Kick the Machine
Films, Illuminations
Films (Past Lives),
Anna Sanders Films,
Match Factory
Productions, Astro Shaw
Production Companies

A Kick the Machine Films and Illuminations Films (Past Lives) production
In co-production with Anna Sanders Films, Geissendörfer Film- und Fernsehproduktion, Match Factory Productions, ZDF/Arte, Astro Shaw, Asia Culture Center-Asian Arts Theatre, Detalle Films, Louverture Films, Tordenfilm
With the participation of L'Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Ministère des Affaires étrangères et du Développement international, Institut Français
With the support of Sordfond, World Cinema Fund, Hubert Bals Fund
in co-operation with the Federal Foreign Office and with

further support by the Goethe Institute
Supported by Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing Forum

Cast
Jenjira Pongpas
Widner
Jen
Banlop Lomnoi
Itt
Jarinpattara
Rueangram
Keng
Petcharat Chaiburi
Nurse Tet

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

Thai theatrical title
Rak ti Khon Kaen

Khon Kaen, the present. Jen, disabled by an accident that left her with one shortened leg, visits her friend Tet, nurse in a makeshift hospital next to a noisy building site. The wards are filled with serving soldiers suffering from a sleeping sickness; local psychic Keng tries to help relatives make contact with the sleepers. Jen stays on to look after Itt, a soldier without visitors; she starts reading his mysterious journal. Glowing light-tubes are installed beside the beds, a trial therapy. One day, while Jen is giving him a bed-bath, Itt wakes and they talk until he relapses. Jen's American husband joins her on a visit to a shrine for two Laotian princess-goddesses; they leave toy animals as offerings. Soon after, Jen is visited by the goddesses, who explain that the hospital stands on the site of a royal palace and say that the soldiers will never recover because their energy is being sapped by ancient kings to help fight their ongoing wars. Jen passes on these revelations to Tet and Keng. Itt wakes again and Jen takes him out for dinner and a movie; he again relapses. The light-tubes begin to change colour. Keng offers to access Itt's inner thoughts for Jen. They tour the hospital grounds, Keng-as-Itt seeing the rooms of a royal palace, Jen discovering statues (some broken), moralistic signboards and debris. Later Jen has an intimate conversation with Itt at his bedside, then goes outside to contemplate what's been stirred by the building works next door.

Fire at Sea

Italy/France 2016

Director: Gianfranco Rosi

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Even if they were bringing the bodies of dead migrants ashore a few minutes from where you live, you'd still brew up coffee and cook dinner with the radio on. Your kids would still do their homework and get to school in the morning. Life would go on – not necessarily oblivious to the crisis unfolding on your doorstep, but existing at some remove from it. That's the troubling situation revealed in documentarian Gianfranco Rosi's portrait of the current migrant crisis as visited upon the tiny island of Lampedusa, a little corner of Italy whose proximity to north Africa has made it the first European port of call for some 400,000 migrants in the past 20 years.

Rosi's ever-patient camera captures the valiant work of the Italian coastguard in intercepting the little boats laden with hundreds of men, women and children who've braved this perilous passage, not all of whom make it to shore alive. The film records the evident distress of those largely African migrants who've suffered barely imaginable privations along the way, while also registering the careworn response of the island's only resident doctor, whose profound humanitarian sense of duty has left him haunted by the horrors he's seen. At the same time, though, Lampedusa's fishermen mend their nets, the local radio station churns out a steady flow of sentimental ditties, a grandmother tends house with absolute devotion, and a young boy named Samuele takes great delight in aiming his catapult at the tiny birdlife in the rugged countryside. On the face of it, these folk share little sense of connection to the global tragedy unfolding close by. As Rosi's film bears witness, the issue isn't even one of compassion, it's more a question of an expanded consciousness from which compassion, and perhaps even political engagement, might spring.

Considering the fairly ample newspaper and TV coverage given to the migrant crisis occurring at various points in the Mediterranean, it would be easy to presume that *Fire at Sea* is telling what's by now a sadly familiar story, but Rosi's whole aesthetic operates in a way that's quite different from reportage's information-driven approach. For him, the key to entering the lives of others lies in making time to take in their environment, whether that's the Rome ring road in *Sacro GRA* (2013), the River Ganges in *Boatman* (1993), a forgotten corner of the Californian desert in *Below Sea Level* (2008) or even the microcosm of an anonymous hotel in *El Sicario, Room 164* (2010). Here, he's fascinated by the parched, rocky terrain of Lampedusa, its mazy trees, empty village streets and the ever-changing seascape enveloping it – all laid out calm, composed frames.

He doesn't make a fetish of shot duration in the slow-cinema manner, yet his film allows the contours of contrasting lives to emerge from these surroundings: he accompanies local boy Samuele (typically, it's more than half an hour before we even learn his name) and his trusty catapult out into the scrub, but also follows the rescue process, from desperate radio message to naval interception, retrieval and on-shore reception of myriad dehydrated and exhausted migrants. There's a certain reserve to all of this, since Rosi



Target practice: Samuele Caruana in Gianfranco Rosi's documentary about Lampedusa's migrant crisis

is not one to stick a microphone in anyone's face. Indeed, there are only a handful of moments when the participants address him behind the camera, so even though we're obviously watching a construct, there's less a sense of a news story being hunted, gathered and pieced together for maximum emotional impact than an impression that we're an invisible observer

of events that would be happening in exactly the same way were Rosi's camera not there.

For that reason, some viewers may find the film slightly frustrating, and be eager to know more about the individual stories behind the haunted looks of the migrants rescued just in time, and possibly rather less about the somewhat horrid little Italian scamp who takes



Journey's end: Samuele Caruana



such delight in firing an imaginary machine gun and making noises to match. There may be those who find the portrayal of the migrants somewhat depersonalised, that the footage of these huddled masses being shuttled hither and thither makes them seem anonymous and thus unknowable. In which case, it's instructive to recall a key moment in Rosi's filmography, in *Below Sea Level*, his portrait of a community of misfits living off-grid in the wilds of California. In that film, the laidback resident of a converted school bus recounts the discretion with which he treats his neighbours: he doesn't ask questions, and allows contact to proceed at its own pace, because essentially, he says, "Everyone has their own private stuff going on." That's an attitude you'll see played out throughout Rosi's work; the fact that he acts as a one-man crew and develops trust with his subjects makes each film about whatever those subjects choose to give of themselves, rather than what Rosi can take from them. The extraordinary confessional that is *El Sicario*, *Room 164* – Rosi's encounter with a Mexican cartel henchman and his blood-soaked past deeds – is an obvious case in point, but just as remarkable here is Rosi being allowed to eavesdrop on a prayer meeting at which a group of African migrants give thanks for their deliverance. As one of their number narrates the saga of their harrowing journey from Nigeria, his fellows sustain a rising and

Moral courage and filmic artistry exist side by side in this essential offering from a director gradually earning the right to be thought of as one of the greats of our era

falling gospel chorus that supports his need to speak and own what they've all been through.

One can't fail to be moved by the sheer resilience of these migrants, yet at the same time it's very clear how far removed their experiences are from the daily lives of most Western viewers. Rosi has absolute respect for his subjects, even when we see them here at their most vulnerable, in states of physical and emotional disarray, and he makes no pretence that pointing a camera at them will magically allow us to bridge that gulf of consciousness between them and us. Indeed, from his first featurette *Boatman* onwards, the challenge of finding a meaningful connection between audience and subject has been his overriding theme, taken to an extreme in *El Sicario*, and played out in *Fire at Sea* in the way the Lampedusa locals' daily round is utterly untroubled by the traumas of the ongoing crisis happening nearby.

What we see of the dedicated work of the coastguard and the Italian authorities suggests no lack of compassion and commitment among those on the frontline – the testimony of Lampedusa's only GP proving particularly affecting – and although Rosi is not specifically accusing of Samuele and his presumably typical family, their unruffled presence in so much of the film effectively prompts the viewer to question their own attitudes and ponder whether their own consciousness might expand its horizons. It's mere chance that in the course of filming Samuele is treated for a lazy left eye, but the pointed significance of his partial sight not passing images to the brain is metaphorically spot-on and thought-provoking.

Overall, *Fire at Sea* is a genuine triumph for Rosi, its distinctive formal strategy respectful of its subjects and offering a perfect expressive conduit for the director's characteristic musing on how film might bring points of contact between seemingly distant poles of human experience. It may not grab you by the lapels and preach to you, but its quiet intensity ultimately offers more satisfying rewards, exquisitely enhanced by Rosi's painterly eye for Lampedusa's magical vistas of land and sea. At its culmination, Rosi's film enters the heart of darkness, confronting the utter horror of the migrants' seaborne sufferings, a harrowing moment followed by a beautiful image of light playing on silvery waves, truly a pillow shot for the ages. Moral courage and filmic artistry exist side by side in this essential offering from a director gradually earning the right to be thought of as one of the greats of our era. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Donatella Palermo
Gianfranco Rosi
Serge Lalou
Camille Laernlé
Story
Gianfranco Rosi
From an idea by
Carla Cattani

Photography
Gianfranco Rosi
Editor
Jacopo Quadri
Sound
Gianfranco Rosi

©21uno Film, Stemal
Entertainment, Luce

Cinecittà, Rai Cinema,
Les Films d'Ici, Arte
France Cinéma
Production
Companies
A 21uno Film, Stemal
Entertainment
production with
Istituto Luce Cinecittà

and Rai Cinema
A Les Films d'Ici,
Arte France Cinéma
co-production
With the participation
of Arte France
Executive producer:
Stemal Entertainment
Executive producers

France: Les Films d'Ici,
Arte France Cinéma,
Arte France – Unité
Société et Culture

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Film World

Italian theatrical title
Fuocammare

Lampedusa, the present. A documentary portrait of the tiny Italian island, which lies closer to the north African coast than to Sicily, and which has become the destination for a steady stream of migrants making the perilous sea crossing. Approximately 400,000 migrants have reached Lampedusa in the past 20 years, but an estimated 15,000 have perished on the journey. The seas around Lampedusa are busy with the ongoing rescue mission, intercepting stricken migrant vessels, bringing survivors ashore, tending to their medical needs and retrieving the dead bodies when possible. The

island's only resident doctor feels it's his duty to help, but life goes on as it always has for most of the locals, many of whom earn a living from fishing. DJ Pippo plays sentimental traditional music on the local radio station; his aunt Maria tends the house; Samuele, a young tearaway who likes to fire his catapult at small birds, goes to school and needs an eye-patch to help his lazy left eye grow stronger.

Side by side with the islanders, yet seemingly in a different world, the migrants continue to land, bringing with them stories of appalling suffering and hardship.



Food for thought: Chantal Akerman and her mother Natalia, whose relationship has been at the heart of the director's films since *Jeanne Dielman* in 1975

No Home Movie

Belgium/France 2015

Director: Chantal Akerman

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

No Home Movie, Chantal Akerman's final film, is both a veering departure from the trajectory of her recent work and completely of a piece with what had come before. Where her last feature, *Almayer's Folly* (2011), was a comparatively lavish period adaptation of Joseph Conrad's first novel, *No Home Movie* is a one-woman-band production, largely made up of semi-surreptitiously filmed vignettes that Akerman 'composed' by setting down a digital camera on whatever flat surface was available in one corner or another of her mother's Brussels flat – one shot prominently features the power cord in the foreground – and letting it record.

The mother, who died in 2014 at the age of 86, is Natalia 'Nelly' Akerman, usually referred to simply as 'Maman'. It is no exaggeration to say that Akerman's relationship with Maman, a Polish-born survivor of Auschwitz, was one of the through-lines of her work. Maman is the correspondent whose epistolary enquiries

narrate *News from Home* (1976); and Akerman has called her nearly three-and-a-half-hour domestic opus *Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), the feature that catapulted her into festival-circuit celebrity at the age of 25, "a love-film for my mother". (When, at the kitchen table, mother and daughter discuss the relative merits of potatoes served with and without skins in *No Home Movie*, you can almost see the potato peeler in Delphine Seyrig's dishpan hands.) Writing about Akerman's mid-70s output, Brenda Longfellow noted: "Desire in these films circulates around the maternal body, around the variable presence and absence of the mother, around the enduring gaze of the daughter at the mother."

No Home Movie concludes with the final and irrevocable absence of Maman, and is throughout intimately concerned with the movements of women within circumscribed domestic spaces. In other words, it shows Akerman's particular set of preoccupations and obsessions very much intact, but finds her adopting new modes and forms in order to explore them. It appears casual, off-the-cuff, something cobbled together from little digital keepsakes, though the 20:1 shooting ratio that Akerman talked about in an interview before the movie's premiere at last year's Locarno film festival betrays the exhaustive process

through which it finally achieved its apparently slack shape. I'm put in mind of Pauline Kael's aside in reviewing Jean Eustache's *The Mother and the Whore* (1973): "It took three months of editing to make this film seem unedited."

Akerman, an eternally truculent artist who didn't suffer fools lightly, has put an instructional warning right in the film's title, which might implicitly be read (*This Is*) *No Home Movie*. There's also a double meaning here, for the interstitial views of desert landscapes in Israel, taken with a BlackBerry camera, evoke the myth of the eternal Wandering Jew – the title might also be taken as *Homeless Movie*. In the Skype conversations between Akerman and Maman – Akerman announces that she is in Oklahoma or New York, though we don't see any view more exotic than that of a laptop and a pack of American Spirits in a nondescript room with the blinds pulled down – we get a glimpse into the life of the peripatetic film artist whose touchstones always remain Brussels and Maman. Over lunch, Maman speaks of her own very different uprooting: her flight from Poland to Belgium to escape the Nazis. This was all in vain, for Natalia was sent to Auschwitz, where her family perished, though this is spoken of only in a conversation between Akerman and Maman's carer, who



'I'm in a good mood,' Akerman says in one of the Skype chats with her mother. 'Let's enjoy it, it's not that common'



Distant lives: Natalia ('Maman') was an Auschwitz survivor who died in 2014 at the age of 86

seems only vaguely aware of the significance of the Holocaust. (Aren't we all, though?)

No Home Movie distills the essence of an intimate relationship picked up between stopovers, passing over months in a matter of seconds. For approximately two-thirds of the film, Maman appears sharp, lively, healthy, even though she's still recovering from a recent spill; Akerman chastises her for eating too little, part of the game of playful chiding that goes on between them. Then, seemingly all at once, Maman takes a turn. Visiting, Akerman finds her rattled by a phlegmy cough and growing lethargic; Chantal and younger sister Sylviane take turns trying to draw Maman back into the world, perhaps not realising the severity of the situation. While previous visits all seem to take place in a grey Belgian autumn, which fills the apartment with soft, diffuse light, in the final stretch of the film it is bright and clear outside, and the interior is largely seen in silhouette – which is not to suggest that Akerman bent the weather to suit her *mise en scène* but that a combination of happenstance, intuition and editing choices creates a total tonal shift in the concluding chapters.

In the Brussels sequences, Akerman alternates between fixed set-ups and handheld work. In the former shots, several of which Akerman appears in, she is always acutely aware of the frame, ceding pride of place to her mother, keeping her own back to the camera. When doing handheld work, she achieves a surreptitious, snooping quality – we never cease entirely to be children in the company of our parents, and Akerman gives a sense of crossing the carpet on tippy-toes so as not to break the silence. Aside from a glimpse of what is presumably a local park, the only exteriors in Brussels are taken looking from Maman's balcony on to a green lawn below, these shots recurring as a refrain and a sort of counterpoint to the inhospitable desert images. Akerman acts as her own cinematographer here (as she did on her documentaries *From the Other Side* in 2002 and *Là-bas* in 2006), and it's impossible to imagine achieving the desired level of easy intimacy had there been an interceding presence in the mix. Akerman doesn't try to erase the presence of the camera, though, making sure to include a moment during one of the Skype chats where Maman seems to hold her tongue because she's being recorded, protesting, "I don't want everyone to hear what I want to say to you."

It's pure speculation to guess at Akerman's mindset when editing *No Home Movie*, but this

moment strikes me as the very sort of thing one reproaches oneself for after the death of a parent, moments that can in retrospect seem like failures of communication at what might have been a crucial point, just as some secret that one will never again have access to is on the verge of being revealed. When I saw *No Home Movie* at its Locarno press screening last summer, my own mother's death was less than a month behind me, which may go some way to explaining why the film moved me more than it did the tiny handful of superannuated hangers-on who saw fit to boo when the credits rolled.

It's not hard to imagine having a hostile reaction to this piece of work, so convincing is it in giving the impression of being tossed off that anyone not paying attention might overlook its calm control and the deep core of pain that it keeps hidden in plain sight. The film's mixed reception has been given as an 'explanation' for Akerman's suicide only a couple of months later, though this does a grave disservice to a woman who, for all her confessed difficulties with anxiety and depression – "I'm in a good mood," she says in one of the Skype chats. "Let's enjoy it, it's not that common" – was nothing short of an iron-clad hard-ass when conducting herself as an artist. I'd been due to interview her, but was told she was unhappy with the interviews she'd done that day and would have to reschedule. We agreed a later date – the morning of 5 October.

I wonder if I'd have had the nerve to bring up my own mother. I wonder too what the fate of this queer, fragile, personal film would have been in the cold world had it not had the marketing hook of a tragedy to sell it. Now Akerman is being celebrated and her filmography is decorating tote bags and *No Home Movie* is getting the distribution it always deserved, though that core of pain is rather more evident now. It's tempting to look at Akerman's suicide in the light of Eustache's, 30-odd years before – the case of completely dedicated personal filmmakers who drew their material from their own lives, and lost contact with their source or, if you prefer, with home. Akerman managed one last trip back – her final loss is our loss, her final victory ours too. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Patrick Quinet
Serge Zeitoun
Chantal Akerman
Editor
Claire Atherton
Sound Mixer
Eric Lesachet

©Paradise
Films, Liaison
Cinématographique
Production

Companies
Paradise
Films, Liaison
Cinématographique,
Chemah IS presents
Produced with
the support of
Centre du Cinéma
et de l'Audiovisuel
de la Fédération
Wallonie-Bruxelles

In Colour

**[1.85:1]
Subtitles**

Distributor
Contemporary Films

Brussels, over recent years. The filmmaker Chantal Akerman records her visits with her mother Natalia ('Maman'), an octogenarian Auschwitz survivor who lives with a carer in an airy apartment, as well as the Skype conversations they have while Akerman is overseas. Akerman and her mother discuss family history: Natalia's flight from the Nazis; Akerman's father distancing himself from Orthodox Judaism after the death of his own father; the rumour of a love affair in Akerman's grandmother's past. The dialogues between mother and daughter (and, at one point, Akerman's younger sister Sylviane) occasionally cut away to scenes of the Israeli wastes. Akerman's final visit with Maman finds the latter grown weak and suffering from a racking cough. Our last glimpses of the apartment show it empty.



Heist society: Tom Sturridge in Omer Fast's adaptation of Tom McCarthy's novel about a man seeking to reconstruct his memories after an accident

Remainder

United Kingdom/Germany/Canada 2015

Director: Omer Fast

Certificate 15 102m 53s

See Rushes
on page 11

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

In this trim adaptation of Tom McCarthy's admired novel, a man who cannot remember his past is compelled to repeat it. He does so via performed

reconstructions of imprecisely remembered events, to increasingly elaborate and ultimately murderous effect. Though a precise explanation for what occurs may be accessible to the highly attentive or repeat viewer, the audience is in large part left to ponder whether the nameless protagonist is the ultimate artist, striving to simulate a reality that already exists and losing his reason in the process; an embodiment of self-seeking exploitation, corrupted by wealth into becoming ever more bloodthirsty and destructive; or a sort of time-traveller, following in the existential sci-fi tradition of *Twelve Monkeys* (1995) and *Donnie Darko* (2001) by sacrificing himself to correct some mishap from history.

What is clear is that the strange accident that befalls the protagonist in the startling opening scene also affords him – via a generous insurance/

hush-money payment – the financial means to make a sensory reality of what another might experience as an inner torment of obsessive, repetitive thoughts. Externalising his visions fails to assuage their ill-effects, however. Instead, the process opens its own vortex of skewed perception, partial recollection and paranoia; and the re-enactments amp up in realism and intensity, with the protagonist proving aesthetically insatiable and morally hollow. Whether he is following a predestined pattern or repeating a sequence of events he's lived before – and whether he even survived the original mishap – are further uncertainties with which the audience may contend. Other hints – of



Arsher Ali as the unflappable fixer Naz

an affair, a betrayal, a conspiracy – suggest a split-off reality in the tradition of *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), in which traumatic events are compulsively replayed in fruitless pursuit of a different outcome.

McCarthy's book was itself subject to near-death, reappraisal and reanimation, having been rejected by major publishers on first submission in 2001, before a modest release by a French small press led to a rash of word-of-mouth acclaim and finally publication in the UK and US in 2006 and 2007 respectively. The book received some renewed attention when Charlie Kaufman's film *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) offered up a singularly similar conceit: a troubled man who, granted independent means, turns the minutiae of his own life into private verbatim theatre. If the specific resemblance was sworn by Kaufman's camp to be coincidental, the two works share strains of postmodern DNA also common to the writings of Don DeLillo, Paul Auster, J.G. Ballard and Will Self: the quest for authenticity in societies besotted with allegory and simulation; the sacrifice of moral goodness to the pursuit of emotional truth; the elusiveness of self; and the potential for the commercial exploitation of all the above.

It's impressive, given the potential stickiness of this web of highbrow context, that Omer Fast's film of *Remainder* feels as fresh and efficient as it

does. A staunch refusal to plead much sympathy for Tom Sturridge's harsh loner of a protagonist makes for a chilly viewing experience, while necessary pruning of McCarthy's complicated narrative results in a more confined and neatly circular story than that of the book. That the film shows us little of the 'real' life of the protagonist as it must exist beyond the boundaries of his obsessive project perhaps has a cost in terms of our emotional investment; we learn nothing of his family or his previous work life, and despite glimpses of his sexual habits, sensuality is lacking. The erotic element of the story is signalled as significant in plot terms and yet somewhat skimmed over in terms of what we see on screen.

Despite this clipped quality and sense of emotional evasiveness, however, the film succeeds in summoning considerable spiritual discomfort. Key to this is a canny performance by Sturridge, who from his first moments on screen communicates a kind of itchy inscrutability. Neither the sort of misunderstood special snowflake that Kaufman might create, nor one of Bret Easton Ellis's blank postmodern zombies, this protagonist is a persuasively detached modern male – at once sexually reticent and sadistic, boyishly vulnerable and autocratic. That the other significant characters – Ed Speleers's Greg and Cush Jumbo's Catherine in particular – receive such scant development by comparison ups the mystique but reduces the emotional charge. The substantial screen time handed to Danny Webb's entertaining but comparatively inconsequential celebrity gangster, brought in to advise on a re-enacted bank robbery, feels disproportionate, and seems to reorient the film in the direction of rather blunter self-reflexivity – though many will appreciate what might be read as a sly




Faces from the past: Ed Speleers as Greg and Cush Jumbo as Catherine

The hell envisaged in Omer Fast's film is intimate and ordinary, composed of loneliness and introspection, petty selfishness and greed

critique of British cinema's preoccupation with old-school criminals and heart-pounding heists.

The director's previous work in gallery art and documentary – this is his first narrative fiction feature – has been much concerned with memory, recording, retelling and repetition. It's perhaps unsurprising therefore that *Remainder's* most effective sequences are those that depict the protagonist as an artist, and his obsessive pursuit of the perfect re-enactment as an allegory of the artistic process: intense flashes of creative inspiration; perfectionist niggling; variably satisfactory collaborators; imprecise ultimate aims. The protagonist's investment of a small fortune in a project only he understands could also be understood as a comment on the eccentricities of the art market. Genre plays into *Remainder's* makeup too, particularly the school of psychological horror originated by *Carnival of Souls* (1962) and further exemplified by *Jacob's Ladder* (1990), in which the protagonist's ordeal finally proves to have been a posthumous struggle for his or her soul. But the hell envisaged here is intimate and ordinary, composed of loneliness and introspection, petty selfishness and greed. The acquisition of considerable wealth appears to encourage our anti-hero towards murderousness – though for all we know he could have been heading that way already. The closest approximation of heaven, meanwhile, seems to offer itself not through any personal connection or good act but via the satisfying replication of chains of sensory stimuli from the past. "If the details aren't right, then it doesn't work," the protagonist tells his deadpan, unflappable fixer Naz (Arsher Ali) as they reconstruct the bank job for the umpteenth time.

That Fast also seems to enjoy detailed but ambiguous sequences more than linear or obviously meaningful narrative means that the film is slightly awkwardly placed between plotty thriller and experimental puzzle. The tension it builds is persuasive, however; and if the visuals and script can both at times tend towards flatness, texture is added by Schneider TM's tense, agile electronic score. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Natasha Dack Ojumu
Malte Grunert

Written by

Omer Fast
Based on the novel
by Tom McCarthy

Director of

Photography

Lukas Ströbel

Editor

Andrew Bird

Production Designer

Adrian Smith

Music

Schneider TM

Sound Recordists

Nigel Albermaniche
Manfred Banach

Costume Designer

Sam Perry

©Remainder

Limited, The British
Film Institute

Production

Companies

The BFI, Tigerlily Films

and Amusement

Park in association

with Soda Film +

Art, Phi Films with

support from DFFF,

Medienboard Berlin

Brandenburg and

Filmförderung

Hamburg-Schleswig

Holstein in co-

production with

ZDF/ARTE present

a film by Omer Fast

Supported by

Filmförderung

Hamburg-

Schleswig Holstein,

Medienboard

Berlin-Brandenburg,

Investitionsbank des

Landes Brandenburg,

Deutscher

Filmförderfonds

Developed with the

support of Film4

Made with the

support of the

Zabludowicz

Collection, BFI's

Film Fund

Executive Producers

Lizzie Francke

Phoebe Greenberg

Penny Mancuso

Etan Ilfeld

Markus Hannebauer

Jane Wright

Jane Hawley

Cast

Tom Sturridge

Tom

Cush Jumbo

Catherine

Ed Speleers

Greg

Danny Webb

Samuels

Nicholas Farrell

Daubenay

Arsher Ali

Naz

Jumayn Hunter

Christopher

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Soda Pictures

London, the present. Watched by a woman, Catherine, a young man with a suitcase urgently tries to catch a taxi. He is struck on the head by a piece of mechanical detritus that appears to drop out of the sky. He spends a long period in a coma, during which time a lawyer enlisted by his friend Greg negotiates with the company responsible for the accident. Awakening, the protagonist is told that the lawyer has won him £8.5 million; in return, he must agree never to discuss what has occurred. He begins to experience visions of a tenement building with various people, sounds and smells passing through it. With the help of a fixer, Naz, he uses the insurance money to purchase an identical building, and to employ actors to re-enact the scene he has been envisaging. He recognises a local youth, Christopher, on the street, and enlists him to take part. Two threatening men pursue him in search of the suitcase. Catherine visits him, apparently following up on a previous liaison; they kiss, but he does not trust her, and besieges her with questions. He rebuffs overtures of friendship from Greg, who claims to be Catherine's ex-husband. He hires prostitutes to re-enact his encounters with Catherine. The two violent men attack and kill Christopher, planting a gun on

his body. The protagonist stages a reconstruction of the murder, playing Christopher himself. He becomes violent with one of the prostitutes. He learns from a news report that Christopher's death has been linked, through the planted gun, to a recent armed bank robbery. One of the violent men, seemingly a police officer, appears in footage of the crime's aftermath. The protagonist turns his attention to re-enacting the bank robbery, enlisting a celebrity bank robber to advise. Finally, and without the actors' knowledge, he insists on shifting the performance to the real bank, and on using real guns and bullets. He joins in the performance himself as one of the robbers. Naz indicates that all the participants will have to be eliminated afterwards. Catherine is revealed to work for the bank, and is present at the time of the robbery, retrieving a suitcase from a storage locker. The two violent policemen are also present. One actor is accidentally killed during the robbery; when the others panic, the protagonist kills them too. The protagonist takes the suitcase from Catherine and leaves with it, in a repeat of the opening scene. The object falls from the sky once more. He waits for it to hit him.

Adult Life Skills

United Kingdom/Sweden 2015
Director: Rachel Tunnard

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

There's a thin line between being a maverick genius and just being some arsehole that everyone else finds annoying. So says Anna (Jodie Whittaker), the unkempt misfit at the heart of Rachel Tunnard's debut feature. Dressed like a homeless teenager and living in a garden shed, Anna spends her working hours cleaning graffiti and counting moles at Wilburwood Outdoor Pursuits Centre and her spare time making videos in which her thumbs, faces drawn on, play starring roles. This is no mere failure to launch, for Anna is living *back* at home (back from where, we're never told) with her mum Marion (Lorraine Ashbourne) and nana Jean (Marcia Warren) following the loss of her beloved twin brother Billy. Bereaved Anna has cocooned herself in the fetid shed, gorgeously rendered by production designer Beck Rainford as ripe to the point of rot with souvenirs of an adolescence shared with Billy.

But when Anna's florid best friend Fiona (Rachael Deering) returns from a delayed gap year in East Asia, and Anna strikes up a friendship with oddball eight-year-old Clint, it seems she may break free of her self-imposed solitude. Inside Fiona's shed, DP Bet Rourich's camera shoves up close; then, as Anna begins to relax, we're given some breathing room. The space opens up and empties out, giving way to wider distance shots that take in the damp green pastures of the Peak District, against which Anna, in her red cagoule, is an angry slash of colour.

There's something about the peculiar murk of the landscape that underlines how very British – and northern – *Adult Life Skills* is. Tunnard clearly knows her Hollywood blockbusters and has a prickly awareness of their sexism (Anna's ambivalence over the *Rocky* films is a comic highlight), but her primary influences seem to spring from British comedy. There are echoes of *The Mighty Boosh* and *The Adam and Joe Show* in the film's home-video aesthetic, of Caroline Aherne's *The Royle Family* and the late Victoria Wood in the dry, spit-your-tea-out-funny one-liners delivered by its long-suffering but saucy heroines.



Thumb wars: Jodie Whittaker

These women provide the film's humour and also its emotional power – particularly in a quiet moment of consolation between the ever-at-loggerheads Marion and Jean, and the triumphant reconciliation between Anna and Fiona (the latter sporting a David Hasselhoff mask). Edward Hogg and Brett Goldstein, as ghost Billy and would-be romantic interest Brendan respectively, are charismatic enough, and newcomer Ozzy Myers is endearingly awkward as Clint. But they are all, as Fiona might put it, a bit of a Debbie Downer, whereas every moment that Deering and Whittaker are on screen together crackles with energy. Their recreation of a teenage night out in Huddersfield, complete with cheap petrol-station booze, is some riot.

Developed from Tunnard's Bafta-nominated short *Emotional Fusebox*, *Adult Life Skills* doesn't quite feel fully realised as a feature, and lacks the coherence and ambition to qualify for genius. It's also a touch too mawkish and quirky (think existential vegetables and grown women in Brownie uniforms). But it's a long, long way from annoying. When it does what it does best, which is to focus on its excellent female leads, it's a smart, joyful rendering of the ways in which women, to borrow a phrase from adopted Yorkshireman Philip Larkin, share their secrets "like a happy funeral".

Alice Through the Looking Glass

USA 2016, Director: James Bobin
Certificate PG 112m 48s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Every film adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* steals characters and events from both books, but Tim Burton's 2010 *Alice in Wonderland* went further than most, taking familiar characters and images while scrapping practically everything else. Upping Alice's age from nearly eight to 19, the film climaxed with her beheading the Jabberwocky monster, a roaring generic CGI beast a far cry from Carroll's conception. The film attracted venomous reviews, but a gross north of \$1 billion meant that a sequel was certain. With James Bobin (*The Muppets*, *Muppets Most Wanted*) taking over from Burton as director, *Alice Through the Looking Glass* continues further down the same dismal path. This isn't so much an adaptation of either book as a cynical exercise in which characters from a now established brand are put through their paces again as part of a new, putatively 'original' adventure.

The first film ended with Alice (Mia Wasikowska) joining her father's shipping business; the second begins with her in the Malacca Straits, eluding some pirates on the conspicuously computer-animated seas on her way home from China. Returning to London, she attends a party in native attire and argues vigorously for further exploration of the continent, prompting curiosity about whether this is meant as a token offering to lucrative Chinese audiences. Soon, she's back in Wonderland, where an absurdly complex plot is set in motion by the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp). He's convinced that his family, seemingly killed by the Jabberwocky in the first film, are still alive, and wants to find them, as he's tormented by remorse for parting from his father with harsh words. His friends think he's, well, mad, but the White Queen (Anne Hathaway) tells Alice that she can prevent the deaths by stealing a 'chronosphere' from Time (Sacha Baron Cohen, inexplicably pairing a Werner Herzog accent with his samurai costume) and travelling back in time.

That the plot hinges on a psychologically scarred Mad Hatter, racked with pain over being severed from his family, is a firm indication that Linda Woolverton's script has zero interest in preserving the stringently playful, resolutely unsentimental tone of the source novels. Familiar argument and reconciliation are presented in three different ways: Alice, frustrated by poor business decisions, tells her mother that she never wants to be like her; the Mad Hatter, lazily echoing her words, declares, "The last thing I want to do is end up like my father"; and the split between sister queens White and Red (Helena Bonham Carter) is rooted in a childhood lie with serious repercussions. Father-son, mother-daughter, sister-sister: *Alice in Wonderland* doesn't lack for ways to reiterate its very standard point, thereby presumably inculcating children with gratitude for the parents reluctantly accompanying them to the cinema, and the cumulative effect of this narrative/thematic redundancy is terrifically exasperating. (Predictably, there is also an emphasis on the Power of the Imagination.)

Iconic characters besides the Red Queen and Mad Hatter – the White Rabbit, Cheshire

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael Berliner
Written by
Rachel Tunnard
Director of Photography
Bet Rourich
Edited by
Rachel Tunnard
Production Designer
Beck Rainford
Music
Micah P. Hinson
Production Sound Mixer
Keith Tunney
Costume Designer
Rebecca Gore

©Dan Hammer Ltd
Production Companies
Creative England
presents a Pico
Pictures production
in association with
Steel Mill Pictures
and Lions and Bears

in co-production
with Film i Väst,
Filmgate Films, The
Wellcome Trust
in collaboration
with Nonstop
Entertainment AB
A film by Rachel
Tunnard
Made with the
support of Creative
England through
the BFI NETWORK
Executive Producers
Ken Marshall
Richard Holmes
Paul Ashton
David Hinds
Andrew Hinds
Neil Hinds
David Fransen
Jodie Whittaker
Jakob Abrahamsson

Cast
Jodie Whittaker
Anna

Lorraine Ashbourne
Marion
Brett Goldstein
Brendan
Rachael Deering
Fiona
Eileen Davies
Jean
Alice Lowe
Alice
Edward Hogg
Billy, the snorkeler
Ozzy Myers
Clint

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lorton Distribution

The Peak District, the present. Twenty-nine-year-old Anna has been living in a shed in her mother Marion's garden following the death of her twin brother Billy. When not working at the local outdoor-pursuits centre, she makes home videos and updates Billy's website. A week before Anna's 30th birthday, Marion tells her she must move out. Marion and her mother Jean take Anna to view flats with estate agent Brendan, who is smitten with Anna. Anna's best friend Fiona returns from East Asia and starts helping out at the centre. Anna strikes up a friendship with eight-year-old Clint, whose mother is dying of cancer and whose father is an explosives expert. She agrees to a drunken night out with Fiona but in the nightclub she has an upsetting vision of Billy. The next day, she discovers that her videos have been stolen. Distraught, she has an awkward sexual encounter with Brendan. Finding the stolen tapes in Clint's bag, Anna lashes out at him and he runs away. Anna eventually finds him by the river, where she has another vision of Billy, telling her to blow up the shed. Clint and Anna return home. On her 30th birthday, Anna gathers with family and friends, including Brendan, to blow up the shed.

Cat et al – are window-dressing, a collection of a few predictable tics and repeated lines; that they've been strip-mined as fodder for a generic children's movie is an insult. Besides Time, the film's big new addition comes from a series of robotic creatures that serve as his underlings. Tiny and cute separately, when they leap together they form gigantic red-eyed henchmen that look more like Transformers than anything John Tenniel dreamed up; it's hard not to conclude that this two-film (and counting?) franchise hates its source. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Joe Roth
Suzanne Todd
Jennifer Todd
Tim Burton
Written by
Linda Woolverton
Based on characters created by
Lewis Carroll
Director of Photography
Stuart Dryburgh
Film Editor
Andrew Weisblum
Production Designer
Dan Hennah
Music
Danny Elfman
Sound Mixer
John Midgley
Costume Designer
Colleen Atwood
Visual Effects/Animation
Sony Pictures
Imageworks
Visual Effects
Double Negative
Limited

©Disney
Enterprises, Inc.
Production Companies
Walt Disney
Pictures presents
A Roth Films, Team
Todd, Tim Burton
production
Executive Producer
John G. Scotti

Cast

Johnny Depp
Hatter Tarrant
Hightopp, 'the Mad Hatter'
Anne Hathaway
Mirana, the White Queen
Mia Wasikowska
Alice Kingsleigh
Matt Lucas
voices of Tweedledee/
Tweedledum
Rhys Ifans
Zanik Hightopp
Helena Bonham Carter
Iracebeth, the Red Queen
Sacha Baron Cohen
Time
Lindsay Duncan
Helen Kingsleigh
Leo Bill
Hamish
Geraldine James
Lady Ascot
Ed Speleers
James Harcourt
Andrew Scott
Dr Addison Bennet
Richard Armitage
King Oleron
Hattie Morahan
Queen Elsemere
Alan Rickman
voice of Absolem
Stephen Fry
voice of Chessur, the Cheshire Cat
Michael Sheen
voice of McTisp, White Rabbit
Timothy Spall
Bayard the bloodhound

Barbara Windsor

voice of the Mallymkun the dormouse
Matt Vogel
voice of Wilkins
Paul Whitehouse
voice of Thackery, the March Hare

Dolby Digital In Colour
[L.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

London, 1875. Returning home from a three-year expedition sailing the high seas and visiting China, Alice Kingsleigh learns that her mother has sold shares in the family's shipping company to James Harcourt. With the family house as a bond for the trading ship, Alice must surrender one or the other. Following the butterfly Absolem through a looking glass, Alice finds herself back in Wonderland. Her friend the Mad Hatter has become convinced that his family, killed by the Jabberwocky monster, are still alive. To prevent their deaths, Alice steals a chronosphere from Time incarnate, allowing herself to travel through time. Though repeated attempts to change the past fail, she learns that the Mad Hatter's family are indeed still alive and are being held hostage by the Red Queen. Attempting to rescue them, she is captured by the Red Queen, who takes the chronosphere. Confronting herself in the past, the Red Queen nearly destroys Wonderland, but Alice restores the chronosphere to its rightful place. Returning home, she and her mother leave the house to Harcourt, taking the ship and starting a shipping company in China.

Angry Birds

Finland/USA 2016
Directors: Clay Katis, Fergal Reilly
Certificate U 97m 5s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

The *Angry Birds* videogame has become a worldwide phenomenon with a spin-off TV series, so perhaps a film was inevitable. Serving as a prequel of sorts, the film creates a backstory explaining why furious birds first catapulted themselves into fortresses to retrieve their eggs from pigs.

While the third act plays out like a bigger, louder version of the game, the first sets the scene in a gentler manner, showing a harmonious tropical island populated by flightless birds, whose idyll is shattered by the arrival of egg-stealing pigs. The fact that these pigs are first welcomed and appear well-intentioned leaves *Angry Birds* open to a reading as a cautionary anti-immigration tale. Its depiction of family life is also very conservative – only one female bird, anger-management therapist Matilda, appears to have a job.

It's visually effective, however – directors Clay Kaytis and Fergal Reilly both come from animation backgrounds – and Jon Vitti's script has traces of the mischievous charm seen in *The Simpsons Movie* (2007), whether gently mocking Matilda's hippy lair or throwing in a reference to *The Shining* (1980). The film is entertaining in parts, but – unlike 2014's *The Lego Movie* – it doesn't have enough merit to shake the sense of a cynical cash-in. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
John Cohen
Catherine Winder
Screenplay
Jon Vitti
Story
Mikael Hed
Mikko Pöllä
John Cohen
Edited by
Kent Beyda
Ally Garrett
Production Designer
Pete Oswald
Music
Heitor Pereira
Supervising Sound Editor/Sound Designer
Tom Myers
Animation Supervisor
Pete Nash

©Rovio Animation Ltd. and Rovio Entertainment Ltd.
Production Companies
Columbia Pictures and Rovio Animation present
Development

support from
The Finnish Film Foundation
Executive Producers
Mikael Hed
David Maisel

Voice Cast

Jason Sudeikis
Red
Josh Gad
Chuck
Danny McBride
Bomb
Maya Rudolph
Matilda
Keegan-Michael Key
Judge Peckinpah
Kate McKinnon
Stella/Eva the birthday mom
Sean Penn
Terence
Tony Hale
Ross/Cyrus/Mime
Ike Barinholtz
Tiny
Tituss Burgess
photog
Hannibal Buress
Edward the

birthday dad
Jillian Bell
Helene the lunch mom/yoga instructor
Ian Hecox
Bubbles
Anthony Padilla
Hal
Billy Eichner
Chef Pig/Phillip
Danielle Brooks
Olive Blue/Monica the crossing guard
Bill Hader
Leonard
Peter Dinklage
Mighty Eagle

Dolby Digital In Colour
[L.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing UK

End credits title
The Angry Birds Movie

An island of talking flightless birds. One of the birds, Red, works as a clown. After losing his temper, he is sent to anger-management classes. Two green pigs arrive on the island and are welcomed by the residents, but Red is suspicious. He discovers stowaways on the pigs' boat. Fearing an invasion, Red and his friends go to see Mighty Eagle, the island's only flying bird, who refuses to help. The pigs steal all the birds' eggs and take them to their island. Red leads a charge to retrieve the eggs using giant slingshots that catapult birds on to Pig Island. Mighty Eagle aids them. Red saves the life of a remaining young bird and is thanked by all.

Bad Neighbours 2

USA/Japan 2016
Director: Nicholas Stoller
Certificate 15 92m 24s

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

Nicholas Stoller's raucous 2014 comedy *Bad Neighbours* saw new parents Mac and Kelly Radner's cosy suburban set-up turned into a living nightmare by the arrival of an obnoxious household of college frat boys next door. Expectations for any major deviation from the original's brash and breezy formula are confounded in the opening moments of this sequel, which reprises the thirtysomething couple's fumbling attempts at sex: this time the flames of passion are graphically doused in a deluge of morning sickness to signal that a new sister is on the way for their toddler daughter. There are, inevitably, other less welcome newcomers on the horizon, in the form of new neighbours from hell – the sorority splinter group led by the plucky Shelby, whose dogged determination to party at all costs threatens to put the kibosh on the couple's white-collar dreams of climbing the property ladder.

One might see the girls' arrival as karmic retribution for the Radners' attempts to bring down the testosterone-charged hotbed of their antagonists in the first film by introducing the insidious influence of the opposite sex into its 'bros before hoes' dynamic. "Don't say that. That's not cool any more," counters Teddy when his roommate and former wingman Pete trots out this very mantra. (It is the impending wedding of Pete, now out of the closet, to his partner Darren that forces Teddy's move back into their old house as the sorority's 'fun facilitator'.) This early shift in dramatic focus to the hapless Teddy, the alpha male of the original fraternity and the only one not to have graduated, as he plunges into the uncharted waters of life with the newly liberated sisterhood, initially hints at a degree of self-reflexive irony near absent in the aggressively homosocial ribaldry of the original film. It is a shame that Stoller shies away from further subverting any potentially interesting observations about gender or sexual and social identity flagged up by such moments.

After the girls instant-message between themselves their damning assessment of Teddy's future right beneath his nose and he defects to the household of his former nemeses next door, what remains among the hysterical performances and gross-out humour is a fairly routine cross-generational bromance-cum-caper comedy in which the threat to order is firmly identified as untamed young females. Teddy begins to see the other side to his adopted father figure Mac's cosy domesticity, which he once railed against as a dismaying portent of his post-



Bro hard: Zac Efron, Seth Rogen

college existence; meanwhile Mac's rude awakening as to how college girls behave out of sight of their parents instils fresh fears about his future as the father of two daughters.

This is in part Shelby's coming-of-age story too, though any positive message about young women striking out on their own is rather undermined by the sisterhood's antisocial behaviour manifesting itself in the form of raucous bikini parties on the front lawn and, at one point, plastering Mac and Kelly's windows with a volley of used tampons. Not that the breathless plotting in the escalating war of attrition leaves much room for nuance, nor indeed answers to more pressing concerns, such as why doesn't the rowdy merrymaking bother any of the other inhabitants of the street? Indeed, who and where *are* the other neighbours? And who exactly is looking after Kelly and Mac's own daughter during their vengeful escapades? **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Seth Rogen
Evan Goldberg
James Weaver

Written by

Andrew Jay Cohen
Brendan O'Brien
Nicholas Stoller
Evan Goldberg
Seth Rogen

Based on characters

created by Andrew
Jay Cohen,
Brendan O'Brien

Director of

Photography

Brandon Trost

Editors

Zene Baker
Michael A. Webber

Production

Designer

Theresa Guleserian

Music

Michael Andrews

Production

Sound Mixer

Aron Siegel

Costume Designer

Leesa Evans

©Universal Studios

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures
presents
in association
with Perfect World

Pictures a Point

Grey/Good Universe

production

A Nicholas

Stoller film

Presented in

association with

Dentsu Inc./Fuji

Television Network

Executive

Producers

Nathan Kahane

Joe Drake

Ted Gidlow,

Andrew Jay Cohen

Brendan O'Brien

Film Extracts

The Fault in Our

Stars (2014)

Cast

Seth Rogen

Mac Radner

Zac Efron

Teddy Sanders

Rose Byrne

Kelly Radner

Chloë Grace Moretz

Shelby

Dave Franco

Pete

Ike Barinholtz

Jimmy

Carla Gallo

Paula

Christopher

Mintz-Plasse

Scoonie

Kiersey Clemons

Beth

Beanie Feldstein

Nora

Lisa Kudrow

Dean Carol

Gladstone

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

US theatrical title

Neighbors 2

Sorority Rising

Bang Gang (A Modern Love Story)

France 2015

Director: Eva Husson

Certificate 18 98m Os



Cigarettes and sex: Marilyn Lima

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Eva Husson opens her bold debut feature with an image of crystalline purity: a close-up of gently swaying leaves outside a well-to-do Biarritz residence. The camera tilts downwards, catching the dash of a naked runner over the lawn, then tracks in and around the house, where the impromptu teenage bacchanalia are in full swing. Husson's reportedly fact-based tale – drolly subtitled 'A Modern Love Story', for there's scant romance to be found here – then flashes back several months to patiently chronicle how a handful of bored suburban teens, the titular 'bang gang', become involved in a series of clandestine orgies over one stifling summer.

From the outset, Husson makes it abundantly clear that, for these predominantly comfortable college kids, there's *something in the air* dictating their collective actions. But unlike Olivier Assayas's May '68 drama whose English title adopted that phrase, this is a carnal rather than political youth uprising, its root causes not so easy to discern. Indeed, it's plainly baffling to

some of the teens' baby-boomer parents when they eventually find out what their offspring have been up to – one father, while relatively unruffled by his son's base exploits, witheringly puts them down as "profoundly mediocre" next to the politicised group behaviour of his own youth. There's a sense of inevitability about proceedings, as if elemental forces are converging to create a collective eruption – as the heatwave digs in, TV and radio bulletins overheard in the background constantly report derailed trains and other accidents. While Husson could hardly have dreamt up a blunter metaphor for youngsters going off the rails, her schematic approach in the film's early going is effective in building up a sense of cumulative hysteria.

One curious aspect of *Bang Gang* is its reluctance to home in on a particular character, preferring to keep its point of view shifting. The film is bookended by a rueful, rather superfluous voiceover by de facto master of ceremonies Alex (Finnegan Oldfield), whose callous treatment of the sexually upfront George (Marilyn Lima)

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Didar Domehri
Laurent Baudens
Gael Nouaille

Written by

Eva Husson

Director of

Photography

Mattias Troelstrup

Editor

Emilie Orsini

Art Director

David Bersanetti

Music

White Sea

Sound

Olivier Le Vacon

Emmanuel Soland

Armelle Mahé

Costumes

Julie Brones

©Maneki Films,

Borsalino Productions

Production

Companies

Full House presents

with the participation

of Canal+, OCS,

Centre National du

Cinéma et de l'Image

Animée, Agence ECLA,

Aquitaine Tournages,

Commission du

Film d'Aquitaine

in association with B

Media 2012, B Media

Développement,

Backup Media,

Palatine Étoile

Développement 10

with the support of

Région Aquitaine in

partnership with CNC,

Département des

Pyrénées-Atlantiques

in partnership with

CNC, Procrep, Venice

Gap-Financing

Co-Production Market

A Full House

production

Cast

Finnegan Oldfield

Alex

Marilyn Lima

George

Lorenzo Lefebvre

Gabriel

Daisy Broom

Laetitia

Fred Hotier

Nikita

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

French theatrical title

Bang Gang

(Une

histoire d'amour

moderne)

US, present day. Following the events of 'Bad Neighbours', Mac and Kelly prepare to move house as they await the birth of their second child. Their friends Jimmy and Paula are expecting their first child. Meanwhile, university fresher Shelby becomes disillusioned with dorm regulations and her sorority's reliance on frat-house parties for fun. The fraternity members of the first film have settled into post-college life, though prospects for unemployed ringleader Teddy look bleak. When his former sidekick Pete is proposed to by partner Darren, Teddy is forced from their shared home. He is sitting forlornly in the original frat house next door to Mac and Kelly when Shelby and friends are shown around by an estate agent. When the girls realise they can't afford the rent, Teddy offers to help them turn their breakaway sorority into a sustainable enterprise.

The girls move in but ignore Mac and Kelly's request not to hold any parties while their house sale goes through. The couple's attempts to force out their riotous new neighbours escalate when Teddy joins his former rivals. Mac and Kelly's buyers pull out. However, the couple are impressed by the girls' determined spirit, and agree to rent their home to them; they move to their new neighbourhood.

Biarritz, the recent past. Teenager Alex is left alone at his parents' house while they are overseas; later his friend Nikita joins him. Alex invites friends George and Laetitia over. George sleeps with Alex, while Laetitia rebuffs Nikita. George becomes frustrated by Alex's later indifference to her. Both she and Laetitia grow curious about the withdrawn Gabriel, an aspiring musician. Laetitia, a virgin, sleeps with Alex. One of Alex's house parties transforms into an orgy at George's suggestion. Alex holds further impromptu sex parties, alerting attendees

by text message. George falls out with Laetitia when she finds her having sex with Alex. George invites Gabriel to one of the parties and takes his virginity. George experiences unwanted infamy when someone posts a video of her on a porn site. Gabriel pressures the culprit to remove the video. The parties cease when the attendees contract a variety of sexually transmitted diseases. Discovering that she's pregnant, Laetitia has an abortion. Alex joins his parents in Morocco. Laetitia leaves town for university. George and Gabriel become a couple.

Barbershop A Fresh Cut

USA 2016
Director: Malcolm D. Lee
Certificate 12A 111m 34s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

How much fabulousness is required to minimise the thorniness of respectability politics? In the star-studded *Barbershop: A Fresh Cut*, it takes about five rappers and Cedric the Entertainer. But more than the importance of a good haircut, the *Barbershop* series has repeatedly emphasised the importance of community. The first two films explored not only the realities of economic blight and gentrification in Chicago's South Side, inevitably culminating in hearty speechifying about coming together, but also looked at the idea of pulling up your pants and tightening your bootstraps. This third instalment (or fourth, if you're counting the all-female spin-off *Beauty Shop*) tries to be even more ambitious by taking on gun violence and gangs, struggling to reconcile the optimism of Obama's presidency with such harsh realities. (What does it mean that the first black president, who began his public-service career in Chicago, has done so little for black people in the city?) While it's commendable for a feature film to take on such issues – refuting the ludicrous 'All Lives Matter' assertion that inner-city blacks don't care about black-on-black crime – its proposed solutions are about as weak as its commentaries on 'Instagram hoes' and the use of the word 'flek'.

Aside from juggling two extremely different tones, *Fresh Cut's* failure to engage seriously with gun violence or to be truly funny stems from its sizeable cast. The barbershop and beauty shop belonging, respectively, to Calvin (Ice Cube) and Gina (Queen Latifah) have merged for financial reasons, which puts the formerly sub-rosa grievances with the opposite sex out in the open – and also needlessly doubles the number of people in any given scene. The result is a constant, un witty din of sniping along gender lines. It's a mindless animosity that, while possibly true of certain parts of the country (or YouTube comments sections), is deathly dull to watch.

The film squanders two interesting callbacks to the first instalment: J.D. (Anthony Anderson),



Cutting loose: Ice Cube, Cedric The Entertainer

the hapless ATM thief, is now working a scam involving a fake food charity; the haughty Jimmy has moved on from cutting heads to some vaguely defined position in city government. But these characters are relegated to the back in favour of the easy laughs and broad points about race that white barber Isaac (Troy Garity) and Indian barber Raja (Utkarsh Ambudkar) engender.

When *Fresh Cut* does try to get serious and focus on those characters most directly affected by the lure of gangs – Calvin's son Jalen (Michael Rainey Jr) and Kenny (Diallo Thompson), son of Rashad (Common) – their motivations are filtered through the disdain and horror of their parents, yet another instance of the film's constant desire to look down at social problems rather than address them on an equal footing. (Aside from its lack of masterful aesthetics, this is the greatest difference between *Fresh Cut* and Spike Lee's *Chi-Raq*.) In one of the film's flimsiest attempts at pathos, Anthony (Torion Sellers), a bright young boy glimpsed in an early scene, is shot on his way home from the library, a tragedy that pushes Calvin to exhausted breaking point. Certainly, the senselessness of Anthony's death is devastating and all too real, yet he exists only as a perfect idea (and plot point), not as a fully fledged human being. Obviously, the film is called 'barbershop' and not 'inner-city public school', but it's a missed opportunity nonetheless. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robert Teitel
George L. Tillman Jr
Ice Cube
Written by
Kenya Barris
Tracy Oliver
Based on characters created by Mark Brown
Director of Photography
Greg Gardiner
Editor
Paul Millsaugh
Production Designer
Ina Mayhew

Music
Stanley Clarke
Production Sound Mixer
Shirley Libby
Costume Designer
Danielle Hollowell

©Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc. and Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.
Production Companies
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures and New Line Cinema

present a State Street Pictures/Cube Vision production
A Malcolm D. Lee film
Completed with assistance from the Georgia Film, Music, & Digital Entertainment Office
Executive Producers
Malcolm D. Lee
Becki Cross Trujillo
Ronald G. Muhammad
Jeff Kwatinetz

Cast
Ice Cube
Calvin
Cedric The Entertainer
Eddie
Regina Hall
Angie
Sean Patrick Thomas
Jimmy
Eve Terri
Anthony Anderson
J.D.
Jazmin Lewis-Kelley

Jennifer, Calvin's wife
JB Smoove
One-Stop
Common
Rashad
Nicki Minaj
Draya
Lamorne Morris
Jerrold
Utkarsh Ambudkar
Raja
Margot Bingham
Bree
Deon Cole
Dante
Troy Garity
Isaac

Michael Rainey Jr
Jalen, Calvin's son

Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

US theatrical title
Barbershop The Next Cut

Chicago, present day. Calvin and his staff are still working at their barbershop in the South Side.

Calvin's son Jalen is walking home with Kenny, son of barber Rashad, when they run into a gang dispute. Jimmy, who now works for the city, says that a proposed roadblock will restrict traffic in and out of the area around the barbershop in an attempt to curb gang violence. The barbershop employees worry about the impact this will have on business. Calvin considers moving to the northern suburbs to prevent

Jalen becoming involved in gangs. The employees propose a 48-hour gang ceasefire, and the leaders of the opposing gangs broker a deal in the barbershop. Calvin finds gang initiation material in Jalen's room. Anthony, one of Jalen and Kenny's friends, is shot and killed. Kenny persuades Jalen not to join the gang. In despair, Calvin almost gives up but decides to try another ceasefire. The city opts not to introduce the roadblock. President Obama stops by the barbershop and Eddie accidentally cuts a patch of his hair.

proves a crucial factor in the latter's escalation of a game of 'spin the bottle' at a house party into something far more risqué. However, it's George and best friend Laetitia (Daisy Broom) who are the focal points of leisurely early scenes. Husson subverts our expectations of these characters to an extent, with the initially diffident, virginal Laetitia turning out to be far more resilient than George, whose forthright manner conceals a deep vulnerability and insecurity. In fact, the bang gang's inauguration can partly be attributed to a desire for payback on the part of George. After being discarded by Alex, who subsequently turns his predatory attentions to Laetitia, it's she who convinces her party-going peers to raise the stakes – a spontaneous act of attention-seeking that ultimately backfires, for her especially. Also in the mix is Gabriel (Lorenzo Lefebvre), an introverted muso who lets off steam in mosh pits at private gatherings that are coordinated online and hosted in suburban living rooms – a dour flipside to the equally exclusive orgies taking place elsewhere.

While Husson doesn't excessively labour the sociological explanations, the film offers a few hints at how the group's behaviour is being shaped and influenced. All five of the central characters – Alex, his goofy sidekick Nikita (Fred Hotier), George, Laetitia and Gabriel – are shown to be alienated in various ways. Consequently, the bang gang comes to be emblematic of a sort of libertarian utopia. Parents are depicted as somewhat distant and peripheral figures or, in Alex's case, entirely absent (his mother and father's extended stay in Morocco handing him the wherewithal to stage the parties at the expansive family home). The ubiquity of online porn, and its easy access, is underlined. Hanging out with George and Laetitia for the first time, Nikita's idea of an ice-breaker is to show the group a hardcore video clip. Later, George aims to enhance the mood at Alex's first (innocuous) house party by switching projected YouTube cat videos for X-rated material. Meanwhile Alex and Nikita post footage of the parties on porn sites, which leads eventually to unwanted infamy for one character.

Notwithstanding some fleeting moments of fourth-wall breaking – each of the main quintet turning to gaze at the camera as if seeking validation or awaiting judgement – Husson mirrors her characters' detachment with her fluent but dispassionate shooting style. While Mattias Troelstrup's camera isn't averse to lingering on young flesh, there's a cool distance to the images that differentiates this from the warts-and-all approach of wayward youth specialist Larry Clark. Where Husson stumbles is in documenting the sour dissolving of the bang gang, as shame and STDs sully the euphoria of before. Through Alex's overemphatic voiceover, the film hurriedly tries to fathom moral justifications for the events, concluding that they represented a necessary purging of energies on the way to enlightened maturity. This doesn't really wash with the bitter aftermath we've just seen, nor does an insipid late scene that suggests an Edenic return to innocence for one couple. But if at times *Bang Gang* can feel as empty as its characters do, for two thirds at least it's a credible, potent portrait of teen anomie. Ⓢ

Baskin

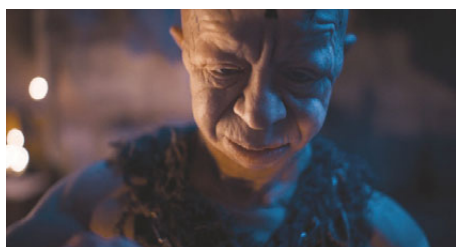
Director: Can Evrenol

Reviewed by Kim Newman

This gory Turkish horror film bears the reductive but appropriate tagline 'Five Cops Go to Hell'. After an effectively creepy dream prologue (too often reprised), a vanload of policemen with one personality trait apiece – bullying Yavuz (Muharrem Bayrak), boss Remzi (Ergun Kuyucu), driver Seyfiz (Sabahattin Yakut), rookie Arda (Gorkem Kasal) and jovial Apo (Mehmet Fatih Dokgöz) – are introduced chatting at an out-of-the-way diner, where a Joe Pesci-in-*GoodFellas*-style argument with a busboy turns ugly. For this sin, they are all punished.

Omens proliferate: a rain of frogs, apparitions that put their van in a ditch (raising echoes of various 'I don't think we survived that crash' films), some nervous gypsies and an old dark house with an evil history. Once inside the house, any plot is dropped in favour of sequences in which a ranting bald dwarf (Mehmet Cerrahoglu) presides over chaining-up, humiliation, torture and general abuse. A few flashbacks find the dream-haunted Arda talking philosophically with his mentor Remzi, and a guessable serpent-swallowing-its-tail tag ties the story together.

Mostly, *Baskin* dwells on weirdly monotonous sufferings, borrowing heavily from *Hellraiser*, *A Serbian Film*, *Martyrs* and others – though the urtext of this sort of tortures-of-the-damned story is the Japanese *Jigoku* (1960). Expanding on a 2013 short, director/co-writer Can Evrenol and cast create vivid characters and then fail to develop them. For such a wilfully extreme effort, it's well wrought but oddly unaffectionate. **S**



Demon dwarf: Mehmet Cerrahoglu

Credits and Synopsis

Production Tolga Erener Sina Pekcanatti	Costume Design Sinan Saraçoğlu	Remzi Muharrem Bayrak Yavuz
Written by Can Evrenol Cem Özödürü Ercin Sadıkoğlu Ogulcan Eren Akay	Production Companies Mo Film, Salt, XYZ Films, Film Colony, Chantier Films	Mehmet Cerrahoglu The Father Sabahattin Yakut Sabo
Director of Photography Alp Korfalı	Executive Producers Todd Brown Mike Hostenich Müge Büyüktalas	Mehmet Fatih Dokgöz Apo
Edited by Erkan Ozekan	Cast Gorkem Kasal Arda Ergun Kuyucu	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Production Design Sıla Karakaya		Distributor Vertigo Films
Music JF		
Sound Mustafa Durma		

Rural Turkey, present day. Policemen Arda, Remzi, Yavuz, Seyfiz and Apo stop at a diner, where Yavuz abuses an inoffensive waiter. Responding to a distress call from other officers, the men are drawn to an old house that was used as a police station during the Ottoman Empire. Venturing inside, they are drawn into an infernal limbo and tormented by demons.

Blood Orange

United Kingdom

Director: Toby Tobias

Certificate 15 83m 38s

Reviewed by Sam Davies

The set-up in *Blood Orange* is pure pulp: an ageing rock musician is holed up in a luxurious villa in the Ibiza hills with his young trophy wife when their idyll is disturbed by an awkward ex determined not to leave without the inheritance he thinks he's been cheated out of by the wife. Throw in a sexually frustrated gardener, a pool perfect for bodies to float around in and plenty of shotguns lying about, and the dots are easy to join.

And pulp is how debut director (and writer) Toby Tobias chooses to play it. There are numerous cinematic echoes: like Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg's *Performance* (1970), *Blood Orange* has a love triangle set in the claustrophobic confines of a rock star's retreat. Like *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), it has a femme fatale and a character who wants to take out a contract on himself. And as in Jonathan Glazer's *Sexy Beast* (2000), mayhem ensues after a sun-soaked Spanish retreat is gatecrashed by an unwelcome guest. But, if anything, *Blood Orange* is a homage to Nick Love's mid-noughties run of low-budget British crime thrillers: a deliberately unpretentious dose of sex and violence.

Love's aesthetic seemed to be based entirely on the worldview of now-defunct lads' mags such as *Loaded* or *FHM*, and in Iggy Pop, *Blood Orange*'s cast boasts a classic example of the 'legends' those magazines deified. From the moment he hobbles into shot, in shades and cowboy hat, with a shotgun slung over his shoulder like a country-and-western Crocodile Dundee, he has a charisma no one else in the cast can match. Admittedly, in playing an elderly rocker with health problems, he has the advantage of decades of Method research in the bank to draw on, but throughout he seems to understand more about screen acting than any of his younger co-stars. Knowing that less can be more and a pause can speak volumes, he seems to dictate the pace of every scene he's in. By contrast, Kacey Barnfield as glamorous gold-digger Isabelle and Ben Lamb as Lucas, the handsome swindled son (and ex-lover)



Villa of the damned: Iggy Pop

too dim to arrive with an actual plan, always seem to opt for the most obvious line-reading and facial expression, giving *Blood Orange* the occasional air of an unusually violent *Hollyoaks* special.

Above all, *Blood Orange* lacks a plot with the kind of remorseless drive and steel-trap logic that can power a B-movie despite cut-out characters and by-numbers acting. Tobias lounges around the pool and dusty hills, waiting for a sense of tension that never arrives. When the cogs of the plotting finally begin to spin in the final act, there's at least one twist too many, tying the film into senseless knots. The feeling that *Blood Orange* just hasn't been thought through enough is borne out even in the title: there isn't much blood, and there's only one orange. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Chris Bunyan S. Gary Sangha Toby Tobias	Arrangement and Score Walter Mair	Tabitha Doyle	Executive Producers Rupert Bryan James Lamb Toby Stevenson Ben Robards	Cast Ben Lamb Lucas Kacey Barnfield Isabelle Antonio Magro David Iggy Pop Bill	Distributor MusicFilmNetwork
Written by Toby Tobias	Main Theme Composed and Arranged by/ Electric Guitar, Acoustic Guitar and Piano	©Lightworksfilm Ltd	for Carnaby International: Tania Sarra Alex Tate Sean O'Kelly Andrew Loveday	In Colour [2.35:1]	
Cinematography Mark Patten	Sound Recording John Currie	Lightworks Film and Carnaby International in association with Eyebiza Film, MPH Film, Trigger Films and with the assistance of 76Ltd and Bare Films			
Editing Alex Martin	Costume Design				
Production Design Alexander Robertson					
Original Music					

Ibiza, present day. Bill, an ageing rock musician, lives in a luxurious villa in the hills with his glamorous young wife Isabelle. Bill's eyesight is failing but he spends his time trying to shoot rabbits. Meanwhile Isabelle flirts with David, who tends to the garden and pool. Their peace is disturbed by the arrival from England of Lucas, the son of Isabelle's previous husband. He claims to have lawyers' letters that will allow him to challenge his father's will, in which everything was left to Isabelle, and a video that she won't want Bill to watch.

Bill tells Lucas that he already knows everything about Isabelle, including her past fling with Lucas, and invites him to stay at the villa. The next day he takes Lucas rabbit-hunting; Isabelle sleeps with David.

Lucas refuses to leave until Isabelle has agreed to give him all the money she inherited. Bill's health worsens and the tensions between Lucas and Isabelle rise. On Lucas's advice, David tries to seduce Isabelle again, but there is a struggle; Bill appears and shoots David dead. Bill and Isabelle tell Lucas that he will be framed for the murder unless he drops his claim to the inheritance. Lucas refuses. Bill, who is dying anyway, tells Lucas to shoot him; knowing that Isabelle will have the evidence against Lucas means he can die safe in the knowledge that her inheritance will be protected. Lucas shoots Bill; he then tries to attack Isabelle but she shoots him. Exiting the pool, she picks up a mobile phone, makes a call and says, "It's done."

The Boss


USA/Japan 2015
Director: Ben Falcone
Certificate 15 98m 51s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Some Melissa McCarthy fans have been disappointed by the number of her comic vehicles reducing the performer to pratfalls and ill-timed profanity; reteaming with her husband Ben Falcone, who also directed her in 2014's *Tammy*, McCarthy proves once again that she's fine keeping herself in this box.

McCarthy created the character of exuberantly selfish businesswoman Michelle Darnell during her time as part of the Los Angeles comedy troupe The Groundlings; with a French manicure and turtlenecks as defining parts of her look, the actress would give lectures with titles such as 'How to Make Money and Not Be a Sucker'.

As usual, the trouble with expanding a sketch into a film is figuring out what to do with the rest of the running time. The answer is a rote backstory explaining Darnell's selfishness: she was an orphan repeatedly returned to the nuns' care, leading her to fear rejection and spurn family.

The plot revolves around McCarthy's building of a Girl Guides-style empire selling brownies based on the recipe of her personal assistant Claire (Kristen Bell). *The Boss* runs on the familiarly ragged riff-and-repeat rhythms of too many contemporary studio comedies. McCarthy falls down a lot and is chided for swearing around children. The only real laugh comes in the outtakes, from Kathy Bates (who has a two-scene cameo). After flubbing a line, she says: "Meryl Streep would've kept going." 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Melissa McCarthy Ben Falcone Will Ferrell Adam McKay Chris Henchy Written by Melissa McCarthy Ben Falcone Steve Mallory Director of Photography Julio Macat Edited by Craig Alpert Production Designer Rusty Smith Music Christopher YOUNG Production Sound Mixer Mary H. Ellis Costume Designer Wendy Chuck ©Universal Studios Production Companies Universal Pictures presents an On the Day, Gary Sanchez	production Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./Fuji Television Network, Inc. Executive Producers Rob Cowan Kevin Messick Film Extracts <i>The Texas Chain Saw Massacre</i> (1974) Cast Melissa McCarthy Michelle Darnell Kristen Bell Claire Kathy Bates Ida Dell Marquette Tyler Labine Mike Beals Timothy Simons Stephan Peter Dinklage Renault Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]	Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
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Chicago, present day. Businesswoman Michelle Darnell is convicted of insider trading and loses her fortune. Nine months later, she is released from jail and stays at the apartment of former assistant Claire. Michelle decides to use Claire's delicious brownie recipe as the basis for a new food empire. Their friendship is disrupted when Michelle mistakenly thinks that Claire has betrayed her and sold her stake in the company to rival Renault, but eventually all conflicts are resolved.

Captain America Civil War

Directors: Anthony Russo, Joe Russo
Certificate 12A 147m 29s




Freedom fighter: Chris Evans

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Marvel established these specific versions of its flagship (indeed, flag-draped) characters in earlier Iron Man, Captain America and Avengers movies. Chris Evans and Robert Downey Jr now inhabit their roles so well there's little need to rehash too much backstory (William Hurt's Thaddeus Ross, unseen since *The Incredible Hulk*, hosts a highlights reel of super-scuffle carnage) before getting down to business.

In theory, DC has the edge over Marvel in that its big heroes Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman crossed over into mass popular culture in the 1940s and are recognisable to audiences who can't distinguish Cap's armoured black ally (Anthony Mackie as

Falcon) from Iron Man's armoured black ally (Don Cheadle as War Machine) or the colour-coded hot fighting chick on Steve Rogers's side (Elizabeth Olsen as Scarlet Witch) from the colour-coded hot fighting chick on Tony Stark's side (Scarlett Johansson as Black Widow).

It's not much of an achievement that co-directors Anthony and Joe Russo (held over from *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*) make a better film than Zack Snyder did with the recent *Batman v Superman*. But it's worth noting that Marvel (corporation as auteur) has nurtured its characters, even in weaker films such as *Iron Man 2*, to the point where they carry more screen weight than those DC icons. However, repetition sets in and the escalation of set pieces reaches 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Kevin Feige Screenplay Christopher Markus Stephen McFeely Based on the Marvel Comic by Joe Simon, Jack Kirby Director of Photography Trent Opaloch Edited by Jeffrey Ford Matthew Schmidt Production Designer Owen Paterson Music Henry Jackman Sound Mixer Petur Hliddal Costume Designer Judiana Makovsky Visual Effects Industrial Light & Magic Stunt Co-ordinator Sam Hargrave Production Company Marvel Studios presents Executive Producers Louis D'Esposito	Victoria Alonso Patricia Whitcher Nate Moore Stan Lee Cast Chris Evans Steve Rogers, 'Captain America' Robert Downey Jr Tony Stark, 'Iron Man' Scarlett Johansson Natasha Romanoff, 'Black Widow' Sebastian Stan Bucky Barnes,	'Winter Soldier' Anthony Mackie Sam Wilson, 'Falcon' Don Cheadle Colonel James Rhodes, 'War Machine' Jeremy Renner Clint Barton, 'Hawkeye' Chadwick Boseman T'Challa, 'Black Panther' Paul Bettany 'Vision' Elizabeth Olsen Wanda Maximoff, 'Scarlet Witch'	Paul Rudd Scott Lang, 'Ant-Man' Emily VanCamp Sharon Carter Tom Holland Peter Parker, 'Spider-Man' Frank Grillo Brock Rumlow, 'Crossbones' William Hurt Secretary of State Thaddeus Ross Daniel Brühl Zemo Sebastian Stan James Barnes, 'Bucky',	'Winter Soldier' Dolby Digital/Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1] Some screenings presented in 3D Distributor Buena Vista International (UK)
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Rising concern over collateral damage caused by superpowered conflict leads the United Nations to propose the Sokovia Accords, whereby 'enhanced' heroes such as Steve Rogers (Captain America) and Tony Stark (Iron Man) must accept political oversight. Steve has doubts but Tony supports the proposals. In Germany, an attack during the signing of the accords leaves many dead, including King T'Chaka of the secretive African nation of Wakanda. James Barnes (Winter Soldier), Steve's WWII friend, is implicated in the attack and hunted by T'Challa (Black Panther), heir to the throne of Wakanda, and Iron Man. Steve intervenes to protect Barnes, suspecting that he has been framed, and rallies others – Wanda Maximoff (Scarlet Witch), Sam Wilson (Falcon), Scott Lang

(Ant-Man) and Clint Barton (Hawkeye) – to his side. Tony deploys James Rhodes (War Machine), Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow), Peter Parker (Spider-Man) and the android Vision. The factions clash in a battle with no clear winner. Steve and Tony realise that Zemo, a Sokovian agent, is behind a plot designed to allow him to find and exploit a Winter Soldier facility in Russia. Steve, Barnes and Tony track Zemo to Siberia, where Zemo admits that he wants to avenge his family, killed when the Avengers fought Ultron in his country. Zemo shows Tony proof that the brainwashed Barnes killed his parents. Captain America and Iron Man fight over bringing Winter Soldier to justice – with Captain America besting Iron Man. Barnes asks to be cryo-suspended. The Avengers split into official and off-the-books teams.

some sort of a peak here: there are good-to-great action, chase and fight scenes (Bryan Singer's X-Men films still have an edge on depicting superpowers) but there's also a limit to the number of times people can be kicked through walls before the scraps start to feel samey. There are two big choreographed face-offs: a mid-film battle on a German airport runway with 12 differently aligned combatants, and a climactic, more intimate (and genuinely painful) struggle that's more about character than gimmicks.

Comics writer Mark Millar's 'Civil War' storyline is only lightly referenced by screenwriters Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, as a falling-out among the superheroes leads them to divide into two warring factions, led by Downey's Tony Stark/Iron Man and Evans's Captain America/Steve Rogers respectively. The initial cause of the conflict, Millar's US Super-human Registration Act, is dropped in favour of the United Nations 'Sokovia Accords', something the real-life US (which does not recognise the International Court of Justice, for instance) would never sign. Rather than debate individual responsibility, gun control, American domestic and foreign policy and civil disobedience (as Millar did), it all comes down to Cap doing everything he can to help his incredibly guilty-seeming best friend Bucky Barnes/Winter Soldier.

Building a plot around that issue means there's an odd absence in this particular Captain America movie. Millar's story is all about America but this isn't – most of it takes place outside the United States. The idea – inherent in the very concept of Captain America – that superheroes represent an American solution to problems the rest of the world would find hard to live with is downplayed.

Timeouts allow for updates on simmering subplots such as the developing relationship between Vision and Scarlet Witch (Paul Bettany and Elizabeth Olsen get more to do here than they did in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*) and the literally expanding powers of Ant-Man (Paul Rudd, a bit subdued). Other characters are brought on and primed for spin-offs: Tom Holland's Spider-Man, the third big-screen incarnation of Spidey this century, impresses in a chattery cameo; Chadwick Boseman's Black Panther (a black character who isn't primarily someone's second best friend) is fluid in action and stiff out of costume in a potentially interesting way.

A persistent MCU problem is the lack of first-rank villains. Crossbones (Frank Grillo), one of the franchise's few double-dyed bastards, gets an early look-in but is benched in favour of Zemo (Daniel Brühl) – who's a typical MCU baddie in that he's more grounded than his comic-book equivalent but considerably less interesting.

Civil War picks up on the greyish, drab-paranoid feel of *Winter Soldier* – there's a lot of concrete, and even the colourful costumes are muted. It's not as gloomy as DC's recent efforts (few films are), and judicious doses of wit and charm relieve the angst and the smashing: Iron Man addresses Winter Soldier with "Hey, Manchurian Candidate"; Spider-Man irritates senior heroes with "Remember that really old film *The Empire Strikes Back*?"; and Ant-Man poses as the voice of Tony's conscience ("You don't hear from me very often"). Next up, Dr Strange... 📺

The Colony

Germany/Luxembourg/France/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Florian Gallenberger
Certificate 15 109m 54s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Hard though it is to credit, the Colonia Dignidad really existed. An ostensibly charitable foundation, it was set up in the 1950s in southern Chile near the town of Parral, and headed from 1961 by Paul Schäfer, an ex-Nazi Baptist preacher who had fled Germany charged with child molestation. With some 300 residents, mostly German immigrants, and surrounded by barbed wire, searchlights and watchtowers, it was run on authoritarian lines as a virtual prison camp, with men and women strictly segregated. As graphically conveyed in Florian Gallenberger's film, the ruling philosophy was fundamentalist Christian austerity tempered by brutality, with a light top-coating of Teutonic folk-kitsch – dirndls, lederhosen and thigh-slapping dances. After Pinochet's military coup in 1973, Schäfer eagerly collaborated with the regime, and a warren of stone tunnels under the camp was utilised to torture and kill dissidents. Throughout most of its existence, the colony could rely on the support of the German embassy in Santiago, which often helped to round up and return escapers from the camp. Charges weren't filed against Schäfer until 1996, six years after Chile returned to democracy. He fled to Argentina, was extradited in 2005, and died in jail in 2010.

This is the factual basis of director/co-writer Gallenberger's film, and it is horrendous enough in all conscience. On to it, though, he's grafted a plot that seems to have been lifted from Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*: a young woman valiantly infiltrates the jail where her lover, a political prisoner, is being held, in order to save him from imprisonment and death. The two elements intersect but never properly mesh, and lose touch completely in a melodramatic hair's-breadth escape finale that tosses credibility into



Love under Pinochet: Emma Watson

a black plastic bag and tap-dances all over it. As with Gallenberger's *John Rabe* (2009) – which suffered by comparison with Lu Chuan's grimly single-minded *City of Life and Death* from the same year, also about the 1937 Nanjing Massacre – a desire to whip up narrative ferment blurs and diminishes the impact of the historical actuality.

Within these limitations, Emma Watson turns in a tough, quietly determined performance as Lena, the courageous flight attendant who braves the hell of the colony for love, with Daniel Brühl (who also starred in *John Rabe*) solid as her boyfriend Daniel. But like many a thriller, the film is almost stolen by its villain. As Schäfer, Michael Nyqvist (who played journalist Mikael Blomkvist in the original Swedish adaptations of Stieg Larsson's 'Millennium' trilogy – *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, etc) makes a terrifyingly volatile monster, switching in a split second from sweaty hugs and glutinous religiosity to paroxysms of demented misogynistic violence. So fascinatingly repellent is he that the temperature drops a little whenever he's no longer on screen. But even his riveting performance can't knit together this well-intentioned, revelatory but ultimately fractured film. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Benjamin Herrmann
Screenplay
Torsten Wenzel
Florian Gallenberger
Director of Photography
Kolja Brandt
Edited by
Hansjörg Weissbrich
Production Designer
Bernd Lepel
Music
André Dzięziuk
Fernando Velázquez
Production Sound Mixer
Carlo Thoss
Costume Designer
Nicole Fischnaller

©Majestic
Filmproduktion
GmbH, Iris
Productions S.A., Rat
Pack Filmproduktion
GmbH, Rezo
Productions
S.A.R.L., Fred Films
Colonia Ltd.
Production Companies
Majestic and Beta
Cinema present a
Majestic production
in co-production with
Iris Productions, Rat

Pack Filmproduktion,
Rezo Productions,
Fred Films
in association with
ProSieben and Sky
Supported by
Filmförsehungsfonds
Bayern, Medienboard
Berlin-Brandenburg,
FFA German Federal
Film Board, BKM,
DFFF German Federal
Film Fund, Film Fund
Luxembourg, Media
Programme of the EU
Executive Producers
Rüdiger Boss
Dirk Schürhoff
Film Extracts
La batalla de Chile:
La lucha de un pueblo
sin armas - Primera
parte: La insurrección
de la burguesía (1975)
La batalla de Chile:
La lucha de un pueblo
sin armas - Segunda
parte: El golpe de
estado (1976)
La batalla de Chile:
La lucha de un pueblo
sin armas - Tercera
parte: El poder
popular (1979)

Cast
Emma Watson
Lena
Daniel Brühl
Daniel
Michael Nyqvist
Paul Schäfer
Richenda Carey
Gisela
Vicky Krieps
Ursel
Jeanne Werner
Doro
Julian Ovenden
Roman
August Zirner
German ambassador
Martin Wuttke
Niels Biedermann
César Bordón
Manuel Contreras
Nicolás Barsoff
Jorge

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Signature
Entertainment

German
theatrical title
Colonia Dignidad Es
gibt kein Zurück
Festival title
Colonia

Chile, 1973. Lena, a Lufthansa stewardess, arrives on a flight to Santiago and joins her boyfriend Daniel, a German student at the university who has turned activist in support of Salvador Allende. The next day, the army under General Pinochet mounts a coup. Lena and Daniel are arrested and taken to the National Stadium, where Daniel is identified by an informer and hauled off. Lena learns that he's been sent to Colonia Dignidad, a settlement south of Santiago run by ex-Nazi Paul Schäfer as an ultra-religious settlement. She travels there, finding that it resembles a prison camp, but presents herself for admission. Daniel, who's been tortured in the tunnels under the colony, is thought to be brain-damaged from his treatment and given a job in the camp workshop.

Men, women and children are strictly segregated in the colony, labouring in the fields and brutally treated under Schäfer's dictatorial rule. Lena endures it for four months, establishing contact with Daniel. Under cover of a visit by Pinochet they plot to escape along with a nurse, Ursel, who is pregnant from an affair with a patient. Accessing the tunnels, they reach the outside, where Ursel is killed by a booby trap. Lena and Daniel hitch-hike to Santiago. At the German embassy, the ambassador seems ready to help them leave the country. Lena contacts Roman, the captain of the plane she arrived on, who's about to fly out and agrees to take them. At the airport, they realise that the ambassador plans to deliver them to the Chilean authorities. Evading their would-be captors, they reach the plane. Roman is refused clearance to take off, but does so anyway.

Crazy About Tiffany's

USA/United Kingdom 2016
Director: Matthew Miele

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

How quickly will this film start to grate on you? If you have zero interest in fashion, celebrity and conspicuous consumption, then you won't get much past the opening, which features quite a good busker outside Tiffany's on Fifth Avenue in New York. If you are intrigued by how apparel fits into wider cultural concerns, you may hang around for a few more minutes, especially when you spy Fran Lebowitz and Baz Luhrmann sitting in chairs giving quote – but then you'll realise neither has much to say. Perhaps you follow design, and you're curious about how Francesca Amfitheatrof, Tiffany's design director since 2013, will make her mark? Stick around a bit longer for some carefully staged 'insights' into her 2015 collection. Beyond that, to stay ungrated, you'll need a high tolerance for rich people you've never heard of talking about how much they enjoy owning expensive things. And even then there's something so repetitive, and yet so hard to follow, about Matthew Miele's film that you could be a lifetime subscriber to *The One Percent Weekly* and still come out with an irritable skin condition.

But that's OK, because no one is really going to watch this bloated advertorial all the way through – are they? Surely it's supposed to just play on a loop in the background at some marketing event, probably with the sound off? Interchangeable people sit in lavishly decorated rooms, with their mouths moving, and that's more or less it; there's a clip or two of Audrey Hepburn, just to back up reams and reams of chat about something-something-Tiffany, something-something-American Dream. The assumption seems to be that *everyone* wants to be Holly Golightly, don't they, a borderline hooker trading sex for presents in little blue boxes? Even leaving Truman Capote's darker creation aside, the sugary Blake Edwards film of 1961 makes the transactional nature of Holly's approach to men fairly apparent, yet Miele links this unabashedly with the idea that a Tiffany engagement ring – and preferably an in-store proposal – is devoutly to be wished for: a tactless reminder that some marriages are barely disguised business deals.

Perhaps the most depressing moment, in a deeply depressing film, features two girls, maybe



Brand success: Sarah Jessica Parker

12 or 14 years old, who have imbibed a longing for Tiffany products with their mother's milk. Their mum is interviewed first, boasting gleefully about how much jewellery her husband has bought her, and we then catch up with her twin darlings, who fall over themselves to explain that the size of the diamond a man buys you tells you exactly how much you are worth. A salesman at the New York flagship mentions in passing that many of the big pieces are sold to what he delicately calls "self-purchasers", but this doesn't fit 'the story of the brand', so we hear no more about such new-fangled nonsense.

Tiffany, like all luxury-goods companies, trades on a piece of doublethink: most people will never be able to afford their stuff, but it's still important for them to know about it and adore it and aspire to it, no matter how hopelessly, otherwise how can rich people know how important they are? That's why they make cheap PR rubbish like this film – and it's one of many reasons not to watch it. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Justin Bare	Edited by Justin Bare	@DocFilm4TiffcoLLC a subsidiary of Quixotic Endeavors LLC
Producer Barbara Ragghianti	Original Music Ryan Beatty	Production Companies
Written by Matthew Miele	Re-recording Mixers Jake Carnitta Gerard Collins	Dogwoof presents a Quixotic Endeavor A Matthew Miele film
Director of Photography Justin Bare		

An authorised documentary about luxury jewellery brand Tiffany & Co. The film intersperses disconnected accounts of the history of the company, founded in 1837, with commentary by interviewees including Jessica Biel, whom we see selecting pieces to wear at the Oscars, Baz Luhrmann and Fran Lebowitz. There are clips of films that feature the New York flagship, including Blake Edwards's 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' and Andy Tennant's 'Sweet Home Alabama'; Tennant is also interviewed. Todd Pipes, who wrote the hit song 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' for Deep Blue Something, plays an acoustic version and explains how the song

changed his life. Wealthy devotees and collectors talk about how much they love the brand. There is also an interview with Francesca Amfitheatrof, Tiffany's new design director, whom we see discussing her vision with other members of her team. There are brief summaries of the influence of previous designers such as Jean Schlumberger, and some discussion of the wider cultural impact of the company, which is said to have invented the engagement ring as we know it today. The company's careful marketing, particularly its decision to associate a particular shade of pale blue with all its packaging, is given credit for much of the brand's success.

The Darkness

Director: Greg McLean
Certificate 15 92m 14s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"One, two, three. One, two, three."

Michael Taylor (David Mazouz) likes to count. Fearless, not always communicative and blessed (or cursed) with an ill-defined ability to 'see different', this autistic boy, with his unusual, often demanding behaviours, dominates and occasionally disrupts the workings of the Taylor household. Not that its other members lack problems of their own: Michael's father Peter (Kevin Bacon) has strayed in the past and still struggles with fidelity, much as his wife Bronny (Radha Mitchell) continues to wrestle with her history of alcoholism, while teenaged daughter Stephanie (Lucy Fry) tries to conceal her eating disorder. Which is to say that there are plenty of cracks in the Taylors' family structure – and those fissures threaten to split right open after a trip to that ultimate geographical symbol of seismic division, the Grand Canyon. There, in the opening sequence of Greg McLean's *The Darkness*, 'Mikey' falls into a buried cave and purloins five sacred stones that he then smuggles, along with their associated ancient evil, into the Taylors' middle-class home.

If Michael is an American Alice, chasing a timepiece (a family friend's watch) down into the nation's dark underside, Bronny too, as she realises that there is something more than mere domestic tensions undermining her home, will later fall into a rabbit-hole of online searches to unearth the film's supernatural tectonics (a contrived merger of Anasazi demonology and autistics' psychic sensitivity). This exposition, in all its bludgeoning repetition, eventually drowns out the psychological substrate the film has at first worked so hard to establish, replacing it with the sound and fury we have come to expect in today's mainstream horror: the bumps in the night, the CGI intrusions, the pan-dimensional portals, the returns of the past.

As it happens, Michael Taylor shares his full name with the 'ocker' arch-villain (played with jovial menace by John Jarratt) from McLean's best-known title, *Wolf Creek* (2003), and its sequel *Wolf Creek 2* (2013) – films whose ripped-from-the-headlines horror interrogated anxieties very specifically about Australian identity. Yet although *The Darkness* is directed by McLean, written with fellow Australians Shayne Armstrong and Shane Krause and includes



Hands off: Lucy Fry

in its cast the Antipodean Mitchell, there is nothing in the film itself that would lead viewers to imagine they are watching anything other than an all-American slice of efficient production-house blandness, with McLean a mere package tourist revisiting old, already well-trodden ground. The *locus classicus* of all this ghostly subversion of the modern bourgeois suburban American family is Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* (1982) – a film remade as recently as 2015, not to mention closely reimagined in 2011 as James Wan's *Insidious* (another film from the Blumhouse stable that is set in America and directed by an Australian). Any pickings left on this corpse may represent McLean's ticket into US filmmaking but it is also dull, derivative horror, lacking everything that once made the Australian director distinctive. For all its slick competence, *The Darkness* has been made strictly by numbers. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jason Blum Bianca Martino Matt Caplan Written by Greg McLean Shayne Armstrong S.P. Krause Director of Photography Toby Oliver Edited by Sean Lahiff Tim Alverson Production Designer Melanie Paizis-Jones Music Johnny Klimek Sound Mixer Pawel Wdowczak Costume Designer Nicola Dunn Production Companies High Top Releasing	and BH Tilt present a Blumhouse/Emu Creek Pictures production A film by Greg McLean Executive Producers Greg McLean Couper Samuleson Jeanette Volturro-Brill Cast Kevin Bacon Peter Taylor Radha Mitchell Bronny Taylor Lucy Fry Stephanie Taylor David Mazouz Michael Taylor Ming-Na Wen Wendy Paul Reiser Peter's boss	Trian Long Smith Sammy Alma Martinez Teresa Morales Ilza Rosario Gloria In Colour [1.85:1] Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
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US, present day. Camping with family and friends in the Grand Canyon, autistic teenager Michael Taylor stumbles into a cave, and takes five sacred stones from the burial chamber within.

Back in his suburban home, Michael talks and plays with new invisible friend Jenny, who, he tells his mother Bronny, lives behind his bedroom wall. The neighbour's pet dog constantly barks, doors unlock themselves and mysterious sounds are heard in the house, but the Taylors are distracted by personal issues: father Peter, who once had an affair, finds himself drawn to new work colleague Sammy; teen daughter Stephanie is hiding an eating disorder; and Bronny is returning to her alcoholism. Yet after Michael apparently kills his grandmother's cat and sets fire to the bedroom wall, Bronny realises that something unnatural is going on. Her online searches reveal that five ancient animal-spirit demons, entombed by the Anasazi beneath the Grand Canyon, can if released turn families against one another and wreak destruction. Peter remains unconvinced – until he sees Stephanie attacked by a supernatural force. The Taylors turn to spiritualist Teresa and her daughter Gloria to cleanse the house. In the ensuing psychic battle, Peter becomes locked with Michael in his bedroom, where the five spirits are taking the boy through a portal to the cave's burial chamber. Unable to return the stones, Peter insists the spirits take him instead. Fearless, Michael manages to restore the stones, and the demons vanish with the portal.

Elvis & Nixon

USA 2016
Director: Liza Johnson
Certificate 15 85m 56s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The photograph of Richard Nixon and Elvis Presley shaking hands in the Oval Office on 21 December 1970 has long been noted as the US National Archives' most requested image, and its appeal hardly requires unpacking. They're an incongruous pair in every way: the formally dressed president and the Vegas-ready rocker, the Silent Majority-stoking bulldog for establishment values and the formerly alarming-to-parents icon, tightly wound discomfort and effortless cool. That Elvis was at the White House to put himself forward as an agent in the war against drugs adds to the hilarity: he was a veteran abuser of prescription medication, with 14 drugs in his system at the time of his death in 1977.

Liza Johnson's *Elvis & Nixon* is the second film based on this unlikely encounter (Allan Arkush directed *Elvis Meets Nixon* for Showtime's in 1997). Unfolding over two days, the narrative sticks reasonably closely to the scanty documentation of the meeting, which took place before Nixon turned on his taping system; to build on internal White House memos, the film's consultants – future Watergate figure 'Bud' Krogh, Elvis associate Jerry Schilling – helped to flesh out the details.

Michael Shannon is a predictably inscrutable Elvis; the actor's reliable eccentricity hasn't yet calcified into the predictable cheque-cashing of, for example, late-period Christopher Walken. Meanwhile Kevin Spacey, a physically unlikely candidate to impersonate Nixon, opts for a greatest-hits collection of well-known traits. Hunched over his desk, punctuating growling about his up-from-nothing past with spikes of irritable profanity, Spacey delivers a plausible caricature; and, thanks to fine makeup work, in profile he looks far more like the president than you'd expect.

Beyond the novelty value of this one-off encounter, however, what meaning can be affixed or extrapolated? *Elvis & Nixon* constructs a number of weak parallels between the two men, drawing attention to the way that both politics and showbiz insulate famous people from reality as

underlings operate ceaselessly on their behalf. At their big meeting, Nixon finds unexpected kinship with the rock 'n' roll star: both come from impoverished farming backgrounds, he notes, and share an enmity for a press they view as unduly vindictive and prone to slanderous fictions. These parallels are pretty much all the movie has going for it, and there's not much to expand on from there.

Getting to the meeting requires a lot of padding: even at a lean 85 minutes with credits, the film crawls. There are dozens of shots of people losing their minds with excitement over seeing the King himself, as well as predictable references to Elvis iconography (Shannon muttering "Thank you, thank you very much", a staffer announcing excitedly that "Elvis has left the building"). The film's most egregiously misguided, needlessly distracting decision is to insert archival footage for establishing shots: the colours and grain of these shots are completely at odds with the standard shiny digital sheen of the narrative material proper.

The film ignores a lot of pertinent context, starting with the puzzling decision to avoid any mention of Elvis's drug abuse. Also left out is the amusing coda to this encounter: ten days later, on New Year's Eve, Elvis and his entourage toured the FBI's headquarters in Washington, hoping to secure a meeting with J. Edgar Hoover. The FBI director was in the building but declined to speak with Presley: in a memo, M.A. Jones, chief of research in the crime records division, wrote that Elvis was "not the type of individual whom the director would wish to meet. It is noted at the present time he is wearing his hair down to his shoulders and indulges in the wearing of all sorts of exotic dress" – all this despite Presley professing that Hoover was the greatest living American. In limiting itself to a two-day window of time, *Elvis & Nixon* adds nothing new to the photo's iconography. Ultimately, the film has no perspective on Nixon – a must for any reckoning with one of the US's most traumatising presidents. And it's strange that, for whatever reason, a movie about Elvis Presley features none of his songs. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Holly Wiersma Cassian Elwes Cary Elwes Written by Joey Sagal Hanala Sagal Cary Elwes Director of Photography Terry Stacey Edited by Michael Taylor Sabine Hoffman Production Designer Mara LePere-Schloop Music	Ed Shearmur Production Sound Mixer Michael B. Koff Costume Designer Peggy Schnitzer ©E&N Investments, LLC Production Companies Amazon Studios presents an Elevated Films & Holly Wiersma production A Johnny Mac and David Hansen	production in association with Benaroya Pictures A film by Liza Johnson Executive Producers Johnny Mac Dave Hansen Laura Rister Rob Barnum Lisa Wolofsky Ali Jazayeri Amy Rodrigue Michael Benaroya Byron Wetzel Michael Shannon Jason Micallef Kevin Tent	Jerry Schilling Film Extracts <i>Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb</i> (1963) Cast Michael Shannon Elvis Presley Kevin Spacey President Richard Nixon Alex Pettyfer Jerry Schilling Johnny Knoxville	Sonny Colin Hanks Egil Krogh, 'Bud' Evan Peters Dwight Chapin Sky Ferreira Charlotte Tracy Letts John Finlator Tate Donovan H.R. Haldeman Ashley Benson Margaret In Colour [2.35:1]	Distributor El Films
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Memphis, Tennessee, December 1970. Elvis Presley flies to Los Angeles, where he's met by long-time associate Jerry Schilling. With the goal of obtaining a badge designating Presley an FBI agent at large, the two fly to Washington DC. Presley personally

delivers a letter for President Nixon to the White House security team. With the aid of White House employee Bud Krogh, a meeting with Nixon takes place. Schilling flies back to Los Angeles in time to meet his girlfriend's parents and propose marriage.

Embrace of the Serpent

Colombia/Venezuela/Argentina/The Netherlands 2015

Director: Ciro Guerra

Certificate 12A 124m 2s

See Feature
on page 42

Reviewed by

Demetrios Matheou

It's not surprising that *Embrace of the Serpent* is the first Colombian feature to be nominated for an Oscar. Its director, Ciro Guerra,

is a precocious filmmaker who shares the great Latin knack for telling stories that are politically and culturally specific, yet with such flair that they will resonate anywhere. And he's been steadily building towards this kind of impact.

His first film, *The Wandering Shadows* (2004), was an unusual, darkly comic and poignant drama about a misfit underclass in modern-day Bogotá; his second, *The Wind Journeys* (2009), a colourful fable about a legendary accordion player on the road with a boy desperate to imbibe his magic, had sequences that were both cinematic and musical *tours de force*. And now his third, a near-faultless amalgam of anthropology, character-driven drama and adventure that is visually resplendent, emotive, at times surprisingly witty and deeply mysterious. It's also a roar of protest against colonialism, told from the perspective of an indigenous protagonist – not cinema's first such character but one of its most memorable.

The film is inspired by the journals of two real-life explorers, the German ethnologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg and the American botanist Richard Evans Schultes, who explored the north-west Amazon in the first half of the 20th century. Guerra and co-writer Jacques Toulemonde have conjured a fictional knit of their experiences, running two parallel stories 40 years apart, involving two explorers and the shaman, Karamakate, who guides them through an Amazonian heart of darkness.

The themes and tone of Conrad's novel loom large here, albeit transposed from another continent, as the travellers experience the horrific aftermath of the rubber boom in the jungle. In the first journey, Karamakate, explorer Théo and his local companion Manduca encounter a mutilated man who is clumsily bleeding rubber sap from the trees and begs them to kill him. At a Catholic mission, a priest ministers to "orphans of the rubber war" by denying them their own language and flogging them. And what was once Karamakate's village now seems caught up in a border war with Peru, its only occupants white men high on the psychedelic yakruna plant.

Forty years later, when Karamakate returns with American botanist Evan, the mission has become the playground of a barking mad self-styled 'messiah', who encourages anyone who displeases him to commit suicide. The scene inevitably brings to mind another riverside hell and another madman, Kurtz. But what distinguishes *Embrace of the Serpent* from both Conrad and Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* is its choice of protagonist. The Westerners here merely provide the set-up for film's actual, refreshing subject: the shaman.

As a young man, Karamakate instructs the boys in the mission, "Don't let our song fade away"; years later, he believes he's become a *chullachaqui*, an empty copy of himself, the last of his tribe, his failing memory removing his sense of tribal identity. So much South



Medicine man: Antonio Bolívar Salvador, Brionne Davis

American cinema is about identity – not surprisingly, given that the continent's history is scarred by genocide and the 'disappeared' victims of dictatorship. Karamakate's final attempt to rediscover his own identity feels like a homage to thousands of others before him.

He's a compelling figure, beautifully acted by the two Amazonian performers. As the younger shaman, Nilbio Torres is a boisterously athletic figure, near-naked frame dominated by striking tribal necklace. He's proud, angry and belligerent, but with a goofy humour that surfaces as he warms to his travelling companions. In contrast, Antonio Bolívar lends the older Karamakate wisdom and calm, and the humour has become droll. When Evan claims, "I devote my life to plants," the old man replies, "That's the most reasonable thing I've ever heard a white man say." Karamakate's insistence that Théo and Evan

are in effect the same man, a result of the jungle's temporal magic, is given substance by the editing, which has some masterful transitions between the timelines: Théo's boat is moving upstream in the darkness when the camera stops following, pauses, then turns as another boat containing Evan and the older shaman moves towards it. It's a sublime moment, one of many captured by David Gallego's crisp and sumptuous black-and-white photography, which gives the jungle a sculpted magnificence and makes the river seem a sinuously muscular, living thing.

The film switches to colour for the drug trip that has been beckoning one of these two explorers from the beginning. Its modest depiction is a far cry from the flamboyant Mexican high of Ken Russell's *Altered States* (1980) and in keeping with a film that honours the mysteries and majesty of a lost world. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Cristina Gallego
Screenplay
Ciro Guerra
Jacques Toulemonde
Inspired by the travel
diaries of Theodor
Koch-Grünberg
and Richard
Evans Schultes
**Director of
Photography**
David Gallego
Editor
Étienne Bousac
Production Designer
Angélica Perea
Original Music
Nascuy Linares
Sound Designer
Carlos García
Costume Designer
Catherine Rodríguez

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NorteSur
Producciones,
MC Producciones,

**Buffalo Films
Production
Companies**
Mincultura, Todos
por un nuevo país,
Ciudad Lunar,
Caracol Cine, Dago
García Producciones,
NorteSur
Producciones, MC
Producciones, Buffalo
Films, Proimágenes
Colombia, INCAA,
CNAC, Hubert Bals
Fund, Programa
Ibermedia
Executive Producers
Raul Bravo
Marcelo Cespedes
Horacio Mentasti

Cast
Nilbio Torres
young Karamakate
Antonio Bolívar
Salvador
old Karamakate
Jan Bijvoet

Théodor von
Martius, 'Théo'
Brionne Davis
Evan
Yauenkü Migüee
Manduca

**In Black & White
and Colour**
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Peccadillo
Pictures Ltd

Colombian
publicity title
*El abrazo de la
serpiente*

No title appears
on the screen.

The Colombian Amazon, the early 1900s. While on an expedition, ethnologist Théodor von Martius has fallen severely ill. With his local companion Manduca, he seeks out Karamakate, a shaman living alone in the jungle who has knowledge of a rare plant, the yakruna, which may cure him. Karamakate believes himself to be the last of a tribe wiped out by Colombian rubber barons. At first hostile to the two men, his attitude changes when Théo claims to have spent time with surviving members of his people. The shaman agrees to lead them to his old home, where they will find the yakruna. He administers a temporary cure, before the three men paddle upriver.

Forty years later. Another explorer, Evan, is following in von Martius's footsteps and also enlists Karamakate to help him locate the plant. The ageing shaman sees an opportunity to recover his fading memories and again agrees.

When the younger Karamakate sees the remains of his village, he angrily burns the last yakruna before Théo can benefit from a cure. The older Karamakate discovers one last flower, which he uses to make a psychedelic drug for Evan. The scientist awakes from his hallucination to find the shaman gone. He returns downriver alone.

Holding the Man

Australia/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Neil Armfield
Certificate 15 127m 51s

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Holding the Man is a decades-spanning chronicle of a gay love affair, encompassing everything from high-school romance to terminal illness. The problem is that the schmaltz soon begins to drip into the storytelling. In its way, the film is every bit as manipulative and sentimental as any Hollywood melodrama – it tries just too hard to pull on the heartstrings.

The film is based on a memoir by Timothy Conigrave chronicling his long-lasting relationship with John Caleo. Conigrave completed the book in October 1994 and died a few days later, aged only 34. The book was warmly received and has already inspired an award-winning stage production by Tommy Murphy, who also scripts this film version.

The early scenes in which Tim (Ryan Corr) and John (Craig Stott) meet at their Melbourne high school are wryly observed. The two actors are far too old to be playing teenage high-school students, but that only adds to the gentle comedy. Tim is an aspiring actor but not one who can manage to convey heterosexual desire when he is cast in the school production of *Romeo and Juliet*. ("You've lost your fiancée, not your bus ticket," moans the exasperated drama teacher.) He watches school football hero John with puppyish devotion and eventually makes contact with him. There is something endearing about the boys' naivety. Lines such as, "I'm Tim... I'm in your geography class, will you go around with me?" and "If all we ever do is hug, that is enough for me" are thrown in.

The film deals with Tim and John's sexual relationship frankly and without prurience. We see everything from their teenage fumbling to an intimate and very tender scene years later, when one of them is dangerously ill. Corr and Stott effectively convey their characters' love for one another, as well as the frustrations and petty jealousies they feel over the long course of their relationship. However, the storytelling style here verges on the clunky – passing decades are signalled by intertitles flashing up on screen, or by the use of some very obvious pop music from the period depicted.

In telling the story of Tim and John's love



Love story: Ryan Corr, Craig Stott, Sarah Snook

affair the filmmakers are highlighting changing social attitudes. Early on, in 1970s suburban Melbourne, the very idea of homosexuality seems beyond the understanding of the boys' conservative parents. As they grow older, there is a slight loosening in attitudes, though homophobia remains. For example, John's gruff, macho father (Anthony LaPaglia) can't bring himself to acknowledge that his son is gay or to tell friends and neighbours the real reason for his (Aids-related) cancer. And a priest insists on calling Tim and John "friends" rather than lovers.

Some of the casting seems awry. Guy Pearce and Kerry Fox are surely on the young side to be playing Tim's parents. There is a lively cameo from Geoffrey Rush as Tim's drama coach, encouraging him to get in touch with his inner ape but bewildered by his faltering attempts to play Stanley Kowalski in a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Tim, as he himself acknowledges, is just a bit obnoxious. "They can't bear me in drama school," he observes. "They say I am too gay, too loud, too self-centred." But it's his headstrong and reckless personality that seems to attract John, who is far quieter.

Unfortunately, the film itself has little of Tim's edginess. Director Neil Armfield opts for a conservative and conventional approach, complete with tremulous voiceovers and orchestral music at climactic moments. *Holding the Man* would surely have benefited from taking a fierier approach and from trying harder to escape the constraints of a tasteful middlebrow drama in tackling its raw and painful subject matter. **S**

A Hologram for the King

Germany/USA/France/Cayman Islands/Mexico 2016
Director: Tom Tykwer
Certificate 12A 97m 39s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

In Tom Tykwer's *A Hologram for the King*, Alan Clay (Tom Hanks), an American salesman who has seen better days, finds himself in Saudi Arabia, preparing a sales pitch for a king who may never actually arrive and negotiating a business culture in which nothing that anyone says can be taken at face value. There are moments here that brush on the Kafkaesque and the Beckettian, though in sum total the film is an unhappily Eggers-esque experience – as in Dave Eggers, from whose 2012 novel the movie has been adapted. In practical terms, this means some wistful ruminations on American Life Today, on-the-nose character names ('Clay', as in malleable), more than a dollop of melancholia and an abundance of winsome, aggressively touching characterisation.

A Hologram for the King has at least one thing going for it in the person of Hanks, who previously worked with Tykwer on his ghastly 2012 adaptation of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. (As with that film, Tykwer has no problem with having actors play against racial type – the two principal Saudi characters here are played by American Alexander Black and half-Bengali Sarita Choudhury.) In several respects Tykwer's movie seems like a companion piece to Hanks's last film, Steven Spielberg's *Bridge of Spies* (2015), in which he likewise played an American businessman abroad, trying to adjust his skill set to a radically foreign cultural context – in that case, going behind the Iron Curtain into East Germany.

In Tykwer's film the culture-clash is with the Islamic world, where alcohol is *verboten*, public executions are a daily event and one must always be on the lookout for prying eyes. For a movie based on cultural misunderstandings, however, *A Hologram for the King* gives very little impression of being grounded in a specific cultural context. The 'hologram' referred to in the title, a video-conferencing tool that Clay has come to pitch to the monarch of Saudi Arabia, can make someone half a world away appear as though they're standing in the room with you. The film might just as well have been made with similar projection technology; though it is set in Saudi Arabia, it was shot in Morocco, Egypt and Germany and – a touristic trip through Mecca notwithstanding – at no point does it give the impression of taking place in a living, breathing world of people independently going about their business rather than waiting around to serve as decoration in the story of Tom Hanks getting his groove back.

The same indifference to specificity extends to the relationship with business and sales culture, which the film is interested in only in as much as it allows for generalisations about new American vulnerability in



Business as usual: Tom Hanks

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kylie du Fresne
Screenplay
Tommy Murphy
Based on the book by
Timothy Conigrave
Director of
Photography
Germain McKicking
Editor
Dany Cooper
Production Designer
Jo Ford
Composer
Alan John

Sound Supervisor
William Ward
Costume Designer
Alice Babidge

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Screen Australia
Production
Companies
Screen Australia,
Goalpost Film, Snow
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in association with

Screen NSW and Film
Victoria a Goalpost
Pictures production
in association with
HTM Productions
Financed in
association with
Fulcrum Media
Finance, Media
Super, Snow
Republic, Goalpost
Pictures Australia
Produced with
the assistance of
Film Victoria

Financed and
developed in
association with
Screen NSW
Principal investor,
development
and production:
Screen Australia
Executive Producers
Cameron Huang
Rosemary Blight
Ben Grant
Tristan Whalley
Andrew Mackie
Richard Payten

Cast
Ryan Corr
Timothy
Conigrave, Tim
Craig Stott
John Caleo
Kerry Fox
Mary Gert Conigrave
Camilla Ah Kin
Lois Caleo
Sarah Snook
Pepe Trevor
Guy Pearce
Dick Conigrave
Anthony LaPaglia

Bob Caleo
Geoffrey Rush
Barry

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Peccadillo
Pictures Ltd

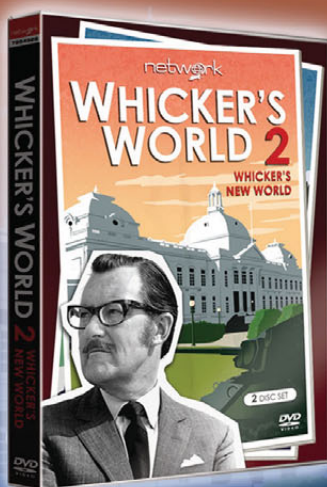
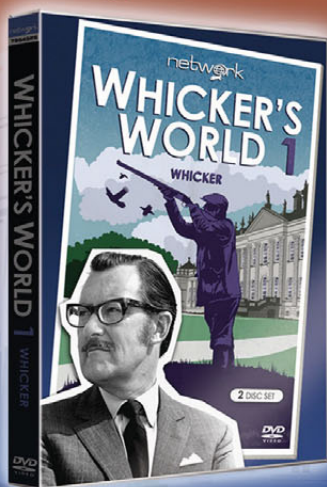
Melbourne, the 1970s. Teenager Tim Conigrave has a crush on John Caleo, the star football player at his high school. The boys begin a relationship. John's father initially welcomes the friendship, as it brings John out of his shell. However, when he realises that the two boys are lovers, he bans Tim from the house.

An aspiring actor, Tim goes to university and drama

school. The relationship with John continues, though at one stage they have a trial separation. Tim and John discover that they are both HIV positive. When John falls ill, Tim tends him. After John's death, Tim goes to Italy. He starts writing a journal about his loss. Titles reveal that a few days after he completed his memoir in 1994, Tim himself died, aged 34.

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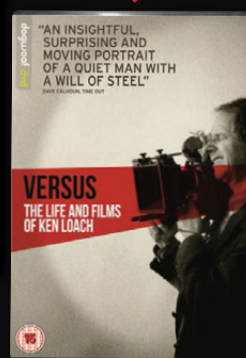


iona
released 27/06/16

even lambs have teeth
released 20/06/16



versus: the life and
films of ken loach
released 27/06/16



the global marketplace and so forth – a comparison with, say, Whit Stillman's *Barcelona* (1994), which was steeped in sales culture, embarrasses Tykwer's film. To the credit of *A Hologram for the King*, it does go some way towards living down a musical dream-sequence opening that has Hanks mouthing a post-Great Recession version of Talking Heads' 'Once in a Lifetime', thanks in no small part to Hanks and Choudhury's too-rare middle-age courtship, but there isn't much product to pitch here. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Uwe Schott Stefan Arndt Arcady Golubovich Tim O'Hair Gary Goetzman	Entertainment A Playtone, X Filme Creative Pool, Primeridian production in co-production with Vingt Deux Heures Vingt Deux.	Brad Megan Maczko Rachel Christy Meyer Cayley Tracey Fairway Kit Eric Meyers Eric Randall Jane Perry Ruby Clay Khalid Laith Karim Al-Ahmad Amira El Sayed Maha Abdullah Al Muslemami Salem Jay Abdo Dr Haddad Waleed Elgadi Sayed Hafer L'Abidine Hasan Zaydun Khalaf Mohamed Ben Whishaw Dave Tom Skerritt Ron
Written for the Screen by Tom Tykwer Based on the novel by Dave Eggers Director of Photography Frank Griebe Edited by Alexander Berner Production Designer Uli Hanisch Music Johnny Klimek Tom Tykwer Supervising Sound Editor Frank Kruse Costume Designer Pierre-Yves Gayraud	WS Filmproduktion in association with Silver Reel, Fábrica de Cine and Lotus Entertainment with the support of Deutsche Filmförderfonds, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Filmförderanstalt Executive Producers Steven Shreshian Gaston Pavlovich Claudia Blumhuber Irene Gall Gero Bauknecht Jim Seibel Bill Johnson Shervin Pishevar	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Icon Film Distribution German theatrical title Ein Hologramm für den König
©X Filme Creative Pool GmbH, Primeridian, Playtone Production Companies A Playtone, X Filme Creative Pool, Primeridian production in co-production with Vingt Deux Heures Vingt Deux, WS Film in association with Silver Reel, Fábrica de Cine and Lotus	Cast Tom Hanks Alan Clay Alexander Black Yousef Sarita Choudhury Zahra Sidse Babett Knudsen Hanne David Menkin	

Saudi Arabia, 2010. Alan Clay, an American businessman who has fallen on hard times, arrives in Jeddah on an assignment to make a sales pitch for a holographic telecommunications system to the king. In the King's Metropolis of Economy and Trade, Alan finds that his team is insufficiently prepared, and that chaos reigns. While attempting to negotiate this foreign environment, Alan becomes friendly with his driver Yousef, as well as with Zahra, the doctor he consults about a cyst on his back. In addition to his medical concerns, Alan is troubled by his conscience – particularly because of his role in sending jobs to China when working with the Schwinn bicycle company, and also because he is unable to pay tuition fees for his daughter Kit. After an unsuccessful attempted hook-up with Hanne, a Danish woman working at the King's Metropolis, Alan visits Yousef's home village in the mountains, where he is briefly mistaken for a CIA operative, and tags along on a wolf hunt. Returning to Jeddah, Alan gives his sales presentation to the king, and has his cyst removed by Zahra. He subsequently works up the nerve to ask her out on a date. She accepts, and after scuba-diving near her lake house, they make love. Undercut by a Chinese competitor, Alan's team loses the bid, but he decides to stay on in Jeddah, pursuing a consulting job and a new romance with Zahra.

The Keeping Room

Director: Daniel Barber
Certificate 15 94m 57s

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

American Civil War films are naturally sympathetic to the plight of Southern women who, while their menfolk are away soldiering, are menaced by Union Army 'bummers' (foragers) and stragglers. Scarlett O'Hara's shooting of the burly soldier seeking food in the shuttered Tara plantation house emphasises her self-reliance during *Gone with the Wind*'s bleakest section; *Cold Mountain*'s Confederate deserter Inman can only shrug sadly when a woman he has rescued from Yankee rapists vengefully shoots the young infantryman who protected her baby. Less palatable is Flora's death plunge in *The Birth of a Nation*, the incident contrived to justify D.W. Griffith's racist agenda – her suicide prompted by the harassment she suffers from the uniformed freedman Gus, who is then lynched by the Klan.

Julia Hart's screenplay for *The Keeping Room* – in which white sisters Augusta and Louise and their black female servant Mad must defend themselves from two predatory Union soldiers – was ripe for the kind of sexual exploitation and gothic bloodletting that characterised *The Beguiled* (1971), but Daniel Barber's lean direction keeps it on message. It recalls both *GWTW* and *Cold Mountain* by sanctioning women's killings of bluecoats to avenge or avoid being raped – augured by a prologue in which we see the two soldiers, Moses (Sam Worthington) and Henry (Kyle Soller), shooting in the back a female slave and a black coachman who witnessed Henry shooting a woman he's raped. Mad's subsequent despatch of Henry following his rape of Louise may be poetic justice but it's also crucial to the three women's survival.

Augusta's shooting of Moses, meanwhile, is troublingly hesitant. The implication that he instantly falls in love with her, having spotted her seeking medicine at a brothel in an early scene, regrettably sentimentalises Hart's story. Augusta is a virgin who admits to Mad her curiosity about sex, and since she is ignorant of Moses's



Dry ground: Sam Worthington

crimes she is entitled to feel attracted to this bearded northerner. But the fact that he has been brutalised by the war does not mitigate his actions or soften the viewer's loathing of him when he sweet-talks Augusta. Given his casual killing of the farm girl, the dangling of the idea that he and Augusta might have been lovers in a better world is a cul-de-sac the film should have avoided.

Before his first feature, the Michael Caine vigilante film *Harry Brown* (2009), Barber made *The Tonto Woman* (2008), a spare short based on an Elmore Leonard story about a white woman who had lived as an Apache squaw for 11 years; regarded unfit for society by her husband, she is gently rehabilitated by a Mexican man, who is subsequently targeted by the husband's friends.

The ministering angel in *The Keeping Room* is Mad, who tends and saves Louise even though she has treated her badly. In the film's climactic speech, Mad tells Augusta how as an adolescent she was serially raped by a white overseer in the 'keeping room' of the title, her babies taken away or slain. Unlike the similarly abused Patsey in *12 Years a Slave* (2013), Mad endures the unendurable. She also makes Augusta realise that, in the name of all victimised women, she must execute a man who may represent romantic love but will likely rape and kill her. Not beyond slapping each other, Brit Marling's raw-boned Augusta and Muna Otaru's stoical Mad make a grimly fierce mixed-race sister act. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jordan Horowitz Matt Williams David McFadzean Dete Meserve Judd Payne Patrick Newall Producers Nicole Romano Trevor Adley Written by Julia Hart Director of Photography Martin Ruhe Editor Alexandra Rodriguez Production Designer Caroline Hanania Music Mearl Sound Mixer Dragos Stanomir Costume Designer Luminita Lungu Stunt Co-ordinator Ciprian Dumitrascu	Wind Dancer Films presents a Wind Dancer Films, Gilbert Films, Anonymous Content production A film by Daniel Barber Executive Producers Gary Gilbert Michael Sugar	Alma Luminita Filimon Prudence Jarman Charles Augustus carriage driver Delia Ricciu Mary Zefir Battle
Cast Brit Marling Augusta Hailee Steinfeld Louise Sam Worthington Moses Muna Otaru Mad Kyle Soller Henry Ned Dennehy Caleb Amy Nuttall Moll Nicholas Pinnock Bill Anna Maria Nabirye	Dolby Digital Colour by Technicolor London Prints by DeLuxe Digital [1.85:1] Distributor Lionsgate UK	

The American South, 1865. Moses and Henry, foragers for General Sherman's Union Army, kill a female slave and a black coachman who witnessed Henry shooting a white woman he had raped.

Augusta, her teenage sister Louise and their black woman servant Mad live on an isolated homestead. Louise, bitten by a raccoon, becomes feverish. Augusta rides to a neighbour for medicine but finds that the woman has committed suicide. She goes to seek help at a brothel, where Moses and Henry are drinking. Moses ogles her, and proprietor Caleb urges her to leave. She escapes carrying medicine given to her by a prostitute, Moll. When night falls, Bill, Mad's lover and a fellow freed slave, returns from the war. He discovers a massacre at the brothel. Augusta realises that Moses and Henry have followed her home. She shoots their dog and wounds Henry. Moses stalks her; they exchange gunshots. Henry pistol-whips Mad and rapes Louise. Mad shoots him. Augusta mistakenly kills Bill in the darkness; Mad forgives her.

At daybreak, Augusta finds Moses in a shed. He says he wishes they could have been a couple and puts aside his revolver. She kills him. A distant fire alerts the women to Sherman's advance. They disguise themselves as men and depart.

Learning to Drive

USA/United Kingdom 2014
Director: Isabel Coixet
Certificate 15 89m 47s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

A gentle, elegantly played if platitudinous piece, director Isabel Coixet's two-sides-of-New-York tale provides a softer take on the kind of unlikely cross-cultural friendship already explored in *The Visitor* (2007): that between an American intellectual and a recent immigrant. Adapted (and broadened out) from columnist Katha Pollitt's wry autobiographical *New Yorker* article about her woeful lack of observation in love and in traffic, it's become an odd-couple dramedy in which east initially coaches west, as patient Sikh immigrant Darwan (Ben Kingsley) teaches driving and the importance of mindfulness to literary critic Wendy (Patricia Clarkson) after her 21-year marriage implodes messily in the back of his cab.

This is, however, no *Eat Pray Love* (2010), where the wise eastern man exists only as a self-help conduit. Darwan's own problems (he is lonely, finally undertaking an arranged marriage, and subject to racial harassment) are sensitively dramatised alongside Wendy's emotional collapse as her husband Ted casts her off for a younger woman. The most mileage the film gets out of eastern philosophy is the Tantric-sex ordeal that Wendy endures on a blind date with a Wasp banker. Neither is this 'Driving Miss Wendy', since Wendy is only being nudged from dreamy self-laceration (at the wheel, she fantasises about running over Ted and his new love) to self-sufficiency. Darwan's calm encouragements about 'being in the moment' and expunging rage may border on the banal. But Coixet does a neat job of conveying both the intimacy and stress of their time on the road (40 per cent of the film takes place in the car) as lane-barging motorists and blaring fire trucks squeeze past at speed, and Wendy baulks at crossing the intimidating Queensboro Bridge.

While the film is less playful and political than Pollitt's memoir (she was dumped partly for her failure to read Anton Pannekoek's key Marxist tract 'Workers' Councils'), it adds a usefully sharp strand about the shock of abandonment in between the comfortable culture-clash



Keep bereft: Ben Kingsley, Patricia Clarkson

comedy scenes. Wendy's uncoupling is set against Darwan's awkward arranged marriage with Jasleen, similarly presented with an eye for realism rather than laughs. Sarita Choudhury, wary and stoical, is notably good as the long-distance bride, scared by America and the highly educated Darwan. When exploring the emotional challenges of the dislocated middle-aged with all three principal characters, the film is at its best. Where Sarah Kernochan's script falls down is in trying to pad out its slight narrative by descending into toothless satire about New York divorces, as Wendy and her sister bemoan men's sexual entitlement.

What carries the film is the pair of fine performances Coixet gets from Kingsley and Clarkson, utterly different in tone from their spiky work together for her in bookish weepie *Elegy* (2008). Kingsley gives an atypically muted but acutely judged performance as the stoical Darwan, crisply batting away Wendy's patronising criticism of arranged marriages: "Yes, yes, you are better off. That is why you are alone and crazy." He gives Clarkson plenty of legroom for her showier, finely detailed portrayal of Wendy, which swings from raging despair to fragile, wisecracking optimism. Even when the movie tries a late gear-shift into a near-miss romantic comedy, the pair handle it with aplomb. They bring Formula One-level skill to what would otherwise be a purely pedestrian comedy. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Dana Friedman
Daniel Hammond
Written by
Sarah Kernochan
Based upon the
article by Katha Pollitt
Director of
Photography
Manel Ruiz
Edited by
Thelma Schoonmaker
Production Designer
Dania Saragovia
Original Score
Composed by
Dhani Harrison
Paul Hicks
Production
Sound Mixer
Anton Gold
Costume Designer
Vicki Farrell

©Learning to
Drive Movie LLC
Production
Companies
Broad Green Pictures

presents a Broad
Green Pictures, Core
Pictures production
in association with
Lavender Pictures
Executive Producers
Gabriel Hammond
Dan Halsted
Jennifer Todd
Harry Patramanis
Eleni Asvesta

Cast

Patricia Clarkson
Wendy Shields
Ben Kingsley
Darwan
Jake Weber
Ted
Sarita Choudhury
Jasleen
Grace Gummer
Tasha
Avi Nash
Preet
Samantha Bee
Debbie
Matt Salinger

Peter
John Hodgman
car salesman
Michael Mantell
Wendy's dad

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Vertigo Films

New York, present day. Literary critic Wendy and her long-time husband Ted break up in the back of immigrant Darwan's cab. Returning a forgotten parcel to Wendy, Darwan agrees to become her driving instructor. Wendy must learn to drive in order to visit her student daughter Tasha on a Vermont farm. Darwan's flatmates are deported by the immigration authorities, but he has US citizenship. He allows his sister to arrange a marriage for him. Wendy humiliates herself trying to win Ted back. She has to sell her beloved house. Darwan cures her panic and road rage during their lessons. Wendy drives to Queens successfully, and swaps life stories with Darwan. His fiancée Jasleen arrives from India, and they marry. She is illiterate, scared of America and lonely, until befriended by a group of Indian women. Darwan starts avoiding Jasleen. Wendy has a disastrous date, fails her driving test and wants to give up lessons. Tasha wants to quit the farm after a romantic break-up, but Wendy persuades her that they should both stick it out. Wendy passes her test and Darwan helps her buy a car. They have become close, and he wants to see her again. She refuses, reluctantly. Darwan and Jasleen work on their relationship. Wendy drives to Vermont.

Long Way North

Director: Rémi Chayé

Reviewed by Kusu Vitto

Even in the cut-throat business of cinema, making your first animated feature is a challenge unto itself. Consider it: a lengthy production is guaranteed, and shoestring budgets are not an option. The market is unforgiving. If you are making a 3D caper with animals, you're up against Pixar; anything else, and your audience shrinks drastically. When your name – in this case, Rémi Chayé – is largely unknown, and you are working from an original screenplay about Russian explorers in the 19th century, the difficulties multiply. So if I say that the most impressive thing about *Long Way North* is that it was made at all, I don't mean it wholly critically. Sadly, I fear that this heartfelt but unremarkable film, a decade in the works, is destined to sink like the explorers' ship.

The setting is Russia, in full late-imperial pomp. On an expedition to reach the North Pole, formidable explorer Oloukine has gone missing. Desperate to find out what has happened to him, his intrepid granddaughter Sacha sets out for the Arctic with a crew of whalers. Throughout, Oloukine's bloody-mindedness is contrasted with Sacha's more successful embrace of team effort. I'll take this as an animator's message to the world.

There is plenty to admire here. *Long Way North* is that rare thing – a (mostly) hand-drawn film – and it achieves a style of its own. The pseudo-anime character design resembles that of Irish studio Cartoon Saloon, on whose debut feature *The Secret of Kells* (2009) Chayé worked as assistant director. But his background is in storyboarding and comic strips, and this is very much an illustrator's film. The layouts in the early St Petersburg scenes display dazzling draughtsmanship. In the Arctic chapters, the artists conjure beautifully graded, at times daringly abstract vistas out of the icy expanses. *Long Way North* looks at its best in these landscape shots. Otherwise, the Flash animation is functional, at times distractingly clunky.

The film's tight budget is felt in the often static backgrounds, notably in an early ballroom scene.

The problems continue with the script. It's heartening to see the team follow Studio Ghibli's example by creating a believable female protagonist. Indeed, the story of a pampered girl coming into her own in a dangerous world recalls *Spirited Away* (2001); but this has none of that film's flair for blindsiding twists and spectacular set pieces. The writers play it safe, and every step of the adventure – from the storm to the final revelation – feels preordained. ➡



Lost at sea: Long Way North

← The gags are weak and the characters archetypes: the no-nonsense innkeeper, the taciturn captain, the scheming prince. The stilted English dub doesn't help: the actors sound as if they are speaking from different rooms.

To produce a resolutely independent hand-drawn feature today is quite an achievement, and to do so (as Chayé's team did) without outsourcing animation to Asia is a small triumph. Unfortunately, the kids this film is aimed at won't care a whit about any of that. Short on laughs, songs, spectacle and resonant characters, *Long Way North* is unlikely to divert them – or their parents. It is a film to be cherished, but not enjoyed. If 2D animation is to survive, it needs to be better than this. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Ron Dyens
Henri Magalon
Adaptation and Dialogue
Fabrice de Costil
Based on an original screenplay by Claire Paoletti
Patricia Valeix

Editor

Benjamin Massoubre

Graphic Design

Rémi Chayé

Music

Jonathan Morali

Sound

Régis Diebold
Mathieu Z'Graggen
Florent Lavallée

Director of Animation

Liane-Cho Han

Production Companies

Ron Dyens presents in co-production with Henri Magalon a Sacrebleu Productions, Maybe Movies production in co-production with 2 Minutes, France 3 Cinéma, Norlum with the participation of Danish Film Institute – The Minor Coproduction

Scheme, West

Danish Film Fund, Copenhagen Film Fund, Danish Broadcasting Corporation, France Télévisions, Canal+, Ciné+, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Académie Franco-Russe du Cinéma, TV5 Monde, Urban Distribution International, Diaphana Distribution with the support of Fondation Gan pour le Cinéma, PROCIREP, ANGOA, Programme MEDIA de l'Union Européenne, CNC - Nouvelles Technologies en Production, Région Aquitaine, Région Alsace, Région Lorraine, Eurorégion de Strasbourg, Département de la Charente, Région Poitou-Charentes within the framework of Pôle Image Magellis in association with

Palatine Étoile 11

Executive Producer
Nadine Mombo

Voice Cast

Chloé Dunn
Sacha
Geoffrey Greenhill
Oloukine
Tom Perkins
Katch
Antony Hickling
Larson
Claire Harrison-Bullett
Nadya
Tom Morton
Prince Tomsky
Martin Lewis
Ivan Tchernetsov, Sacha's father
Bibi Jacob
Sacha's mother
Peter Hudson
Lund
Vivienne Vermes
Olga

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

French theatrical title
Tout en haut du monde

St Petersburg, 1882. The *Davaï*, the ship of aristocratic Russian explorer Oloukine, has gone missing during a voyage to the North Pole. The search for it has so far been in vain. But Oloukine's strong-willed granddaughter Sacha, who shares his passion for travel, is certain that the ship did not sink. In her grandfather's library she finds a document that appears to pinpoint the *Davaï*'s final resting place. Failing to interest the government in an expedition, Sacha strikes out alone. She reaches a port and convinces the captain of a schooner to take her in search of the ship. Set apart from the crew by class and gender, Sacha initially has trouble fitting in. Recognising her navigational skills, however, her colleagues grow fond of her. They soon reach a glacier. An iceberg comes loose, sinking their ship, so they set out on foot across the glacier. Caught in a snowstorm, Sacha finds Oloukine's frozen body, together with his logbook. The logbook reveals that Oloukine was abandoned by his companions close to the pole. He reached it alone and claimed it for Russia. His notes also disclose the location of the *Davaï*. Sacha and the crew find it, perfectly preserved in the ice; they dislodge it from the glacier and sail home.

Maggie's Plan

USA 2015

Director: Rebecca Miller

Certificate 15 98m 38s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

No, it's not an alternative title for the Thatcherite satire of *High-Rise*. Rather, Rebecca Miller's comedy is about a thirtyish single woman with a fetish for micromanaging the emotional lives of the people around her – to a fault, naturally, and with just enough seriocomic consequences to fill out a 90-minute feature.

Maggie, who works as an undergraduate counsellor at the New School in New York City, is a couple of notches more tightly wound than the life-force sprites played by Greta Gerwig in *Frances Ha* (2012) and *Mistress America* (2015), but the actress is still very much in her sweet spot. She has a genuine gift for playing good eggs who trip, sometimes gracefully, over their own impeccable intentions. Her plan, as the movie opens, is to get pregnant, on her own terms and without the added baggage of a romantic partner (in a pretty good throwaway joke, the fellow who's been tapped to supply sperm reveals that his name is Guy).

So far, so self-possessed, except that on the eve of her insemination, Maggie falls into bed with John (Ethan Hawke), the nervy, wordy and very, very married (with kids) adjunct professor she's been hanging out with around school. (He has given her his latest novel to peruse, which for heady culture vultures such as these is pretty much tantamount to foreplay.) John's wife is a brilliant academic (played by a mugging Julianne Moore) and he's tired of being intellectually overruled at home as if on a conference panel. Maggie and her modest little apartment represent a lifeboat that the thoroughly emasculated would-be word-slinger dives into without hesitation.

From there, the movie jumps forwards in time to find Maggie and John in a new living arrangement as parents – both of their own child and also John's brood, who bristle with ambivalence about the new blended-family set-up. The complexity of playing domestic musical chairs is Miller's theme, and her heroine's attempts to control these seating arrangements,



Pregnant pause: Greta Gerwig, Julianne Moore

figuratively speaking, get ever more desperate and dangerous. The second half of the film spins into full-on screwball territory: an honest-to-goodness comedy of remarriage, with Maggie sneakily steering John back towards his ex.

This idea of Maggie as a reverse home-wrecker is a funny one, but Miller – who was a potent, eccentric director around the time of *The Ballad of Jack and Rose* (2005) – is more interested here in keeping her elaborate narrative architecture propped up than in making vital cinema. *Maggie's Plan* is visually uninspired and paced like an episode of a premium TV cable series; the plot points click into place neatly, and that's all. The excellent actors all glide along on autopilot – at this point, Hawke is American cinema's patron saint of monstrous self-involvement, and does it better than anybody else – but there's no spark, no gleam of excitement or madness or cruelty. There's something to be said for pleasant, watchable mainstream moviemaking. Surely, it's not: "More, please." Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Rachael Horowitz
Damon Cardasis
Rebecca Miller

Written for the Screen by

Rebecca Miller
Based on a story by Karen Rinaldi

Director of Photography

Sam Levy

Edited by

Sabine Hoffman

Production Designer

Alexandra Schaller

Music

Michael Rohatyn

Sound Mixer

Jonathan Reyes

Costume Designer

Malgosia Turzanska

©Lily Harding

Pictures, LLC

Production Companies

A Round Films/
Rachael Horowitz

production

Freedom Media

in association with
Locomotive, Hyperion
Media, Franklin
Street Capital

A Rebecca Miller film

Executive Producers

Philip Stephenson

Temple Williams

Lucy Barzun Donnelly

Alexandra Kerry

Michael J. Mallis

Susan Wrubel

Greta Gerwig

Maggie

Ethan Hawke

John

Bill Hader

Tony

Maya Rudolph

Felicia

Travis Fimmel

Guy

Ida Rohatyn

Lily

Wallace Shawn

Kliegler

Julianne Moore

Georgette

Mina Sundwall

Justine

Jackson Frazer

Paul

Monte Greene

Max

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing UK

New York, the present. Maggie is unhappy with her romantic life, and wants to have a child using a sperm donor. She arranges an artificial insemination – the donor being a pickle vendor named Guy – and at the same time begins an extended flirtation with John, a professor at the school where she works. Maggie reads John's novel and is attracted to his literary talent; he complains that he isn't appreciated by his wife Georgette, a formidable academic. One night, John visits Maggie after being kicked out of the house and they fall into bed together; she feels guilty about stealing him away from his family.

Three years later, Maggie and John have a daughter and also partial custody of his two children with Georgette. John lazes around the house, supposedly writing. Frustrated with his self-absorption, Maggie contrives to reunite him with Georgette; the latter is wise to the deception but concedes that she misses her ex and agrees to help with the plan. John and Georgette both find themselves at an academic conference in Montreal, where their romance reignites. John discovers the plan and is hurt, but in the end resolves to try to make it work with Georgette. Maggie is left alone but happy, and suspects that her daughter may actually be Guy's, not John's.

ma ma

Spain/France 2015
Director: Julio Medem
Certificate 12A 111m 22s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Back in the early 2000s, Julio Medem was a critical darling and the great white hope of academic film studies, thanks to features such as *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (1998) and *Sex and Lucia* (2001), in which he conjured spooky atmospheres and oneiric narratives through a style that was not quite magic realism yet bent the usual rules of logic or credibility. In these films, beautiful, chimeric characters skated through a surreal Europe, the events on screen seemingly springing from the well of their desires. As the films drew to a close it was hard to say what, exactly, had taken place. Some 15 years later, *ma ma* arrives, treading a similar line between fantasy and reality, with the story of a gamine young cancer patient who gives birth to a daughter – the spirit, perhaps, of a Russian orphan – even as she takes her leave of this world. But as Medem veers into melodramatic terrain more usually associated with his compatriot Pedro Almodóvar, what once was mesmerising becomes merely risible.

The film opens promisingly, as Magda (a luminous Penélope Cruz) receives a diagnosis of breast cancer from her handsome doctor Julián (Asier Etxeandia). The latter has a picture of a little blonde girl on his desk – Natasha, a Russian orphan whom he and his wife are hoping to adopt. Magda would love a sister for her football-crazy son Dani (Teo Planell), but her professor husband is cheating on her, leaving her to deal with her diagnosis alone. As Magda and Julián talk, the film skitters forwards, to the haircut she has scheduled for that evening, Dani's forthcoming football match, a meet-cute with soon-to-be widower and grieving father Arturo (Luis Tosar).

These oscillations continue into the sweaty summer that Magda spends undergoing treatment, hinting at a sense of predestination, the future contained within the present moment. As the film unfolds, though, the suspicion dawns that we might be trapped within Magda's sickening imagination. Visions of Natasha appear at apparently random moments. We share strange hallucinations, full of heavy-handed symbolism: crabs, nipples, white lights. Is the film all a dream,



Slush a bye baby: Penélope Cruz

a dying woman's wishful thinking? A beach scene seems to be pulled straight from the television commercial that Magda sighs at longingly early in the film. Meanwhile the appearance of Arturo as a soulmate, substitute father and football coach for Dani seems a little too pat, as does Dani's transformation from sullen ratbag to straight-A student and model son, or the disappearance of Julián's wife, which frees up the doctor to dote on Magda and her unborn daughter.

It's this final plot twist that finally destroys any goodwill Medem may have established, pushing the film into heartstring-tugging overkill. By the time that Julián starts crooning Spanish pop songs exhorting Magda and her family to "cry, fight, laugh, feel – that is living", most viewers will have given up trying to find any substance in among all the slush.

The Spanish word '*mamá*' means mammary as well as mother, and is often used as a term of endearment, akin to 'sweetie' or 'honey'. The film is dedicated to '*ellas*' – presumably all those women who have suffered breast cancer. Really, though, it belongs to Cruz (doubling up as producer), who is in every scene and who gives a performance equal to anything she has done for Almodóvar, better even than her wrenching turn in Sergio Castellitto's *Don't Move* (2004). She is reliably watchable during the film's more sombre moments; outstanding when being deliberately funny. What a shame then that *ma ma* is such a disappointing tribute to both its actress and its subject. 📉

The Measure of a Man

France 2015
Director: Stéphane Brizé

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

The French title of this film, which means 'the law of the market', conveys more accurately than the English *The Measure of a Man* the political project at its heart – to show the extraordinary symbolic violence to which ordinary workers are exposed in today's globalised capitalist economy. We follow middle-aged Thierry (Vincent Lindon) as he struggles with the economic hardship and multiple indignities that come with being unemployed: the futile training schemes, the glacial Skype interviews, the brutal demolition of his self-presentation technique by his fellow unemployed, the embarrassing meetings with the bank manager, the haggling over a few hundred euros when trying to sell his seaside mobile home. Then when, after 15 months, he does get a job, as a security guard in a hypermarket, he finds that this consists of humiliating impoverished customers and his own colleagues for committing trivial offences, leading him to leave in disgust. The most damning political comment in the film comes early on, when Thierry rejects his former fellow trade unionists, arguing that he is 'tired', and that their project to take the company to court will achieve nothing. Perhaps, but unfortunately nor will his own individual protest at the end of the film.

Over three features starring Lindon (this one and *Mademoiselle Chambon*, 2009, and *A Few Hours of Spring*, 2012), director Stéphane Brizé has become a champion of ordinary people confronted with the mundane and yet tragic problems of everyday life – a happy couple breaking up, a terminally ill mother opting for assisted suicide, unemployment. In the new film, Brizé further develops his semi-documentary technique to explore the world of work. Long sequences are juxtaposed, without an introduction. We are plunged straight into the action, which then unfolds in long takes, the camera often handheld, on location and with virtually no professional actor except for Lindon.

This search for a 'reality effect' is most successful in the work sequences in the second half of the film. The scenes at the bank, and especially in the hypermarket, include many members of staff more or less playing themselves – from the white male executive and the female security agent to the black woman working at the till. Brizé has cleverly cast people with an extraordinary confidence in front of the camera, which means that Lindon's customary minimalist yet charismatic performance style blends wonderfully with the rest of the cast. In this respect alone, his awards for best actor (at Cannes in 2015 and at the Césars earlier this year) are well deserved. *The Measure of a Man* is very much a Lindon festival, as he is on screen virtually throughout the film, either centrally or as a discreet yet intense presence on the edges of the frame – for example, in the scenes confronting customers or colleagues arrested for stealing.

More awkward are the scenes at Thierry's home, with his wife Karine (Karine de Mirbeck) and disabled adolescent son Matthieu (Matthieu Schaller). The point of these scenes, and of those where the couple take rock 'n' roll dancing classes, is clearly to signify Thierry's happy home life and decent, honest quality as a

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Penélope Cruz
Julio Medem
Álvaro Longoria
Written by
Julio Medem
Director of Photography
Kiko de La Rica
Editing
Julio Medem
Iván Aledo
Art Director
Montse Sanz

Music Composed and Produced by/ Piano Performed and Arranged by
Alberto Iglesias
Sound Supervisor
Juan Borrell
Costume Designer
Carlos Díez

©Ma Ma Películas
A.I.E., Ma Ma P.C.
S.L., Morena Films
S.L., Mare Nostrum

Productions SAS Production Companies
A Penélope Cruz, Julio Medem production
in co-production with
Morena Films, Ma Ma Películas a.i.e., Mare Nostrum Productions, Ma Ma P.C.
With the participation of TVE, Movistar+
In association with Backup Media (B

Media 2012 and B Media Global - Backup Media)
With the collaboration of Gobierno de España, Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte - ICAA
With financing from ICO - Instituto de Crédito Oficial
Film Extracts
El Cid (1961)

Cast
Penélope Cruz
Magda
Luis Tosar
Arturo
Asier Etxeandia
Julián
Teo Planell
Dani
Silvia Abascal
chemotherapy nurse
Alex Brendemühl
Raúl
Anna Jiménez

Natasha, baby

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

Madrid, 2012. Unemployed schoolteacher Magda is diagnosed with breast cancer by her doctor, Julián. That evening, while watching her son Dani playing football, Magda meets Real Madrid scout Arturo. While they are talking, he learns that his wife and daughter have been in a fatal car crash.

Magda and Arturo become friends, and begin a relationship after Magda's husband Raúl, a philosophy professor, leaves her for one of his students. Magda's

cancer goes into remission, but later returns. This time the cancer is terminal, leaving Magda with only four months to live. She falls miraculously pregnant with a little girl, whom she names Natasha, after the Russian child that Julián was planning to adopt before his own marriage broke down. She somehow survives to carry the child to term, but dies while giving birth.

Some months later, Arturo, Dani and Julián are shown caring for Natasha.



Insecurity man: Vincent Lindon

human being. De Mirbeck and Schaller are excellent; the uneasiness comes from scripting choices. The inclusion of a disabled son on top of Thierry's other problems seems to tip the balance towards melodrama. More problematic is the fact that Kthearine is virtually silent throughout the film. She barely has a name (we hear it once when they are trying to sell their seaside mobile home) and we have no sense of her life – we don't know, for instance, whether she has a job or not: the film treat employment as a male issue. And since, somewhat implausibly, caring for Matthieu (including bathing him and cooking) appears to be Thierry's job rather than Karine's, she is marginalised even further.

The awards Lindon has won for *Measure of a Man* – along with the Palme d'Or given to Jacques

Audiard's *Dheepan* at the same 2015 Cannes festival – illustrate a desire on the part of the industry to encourage a more socially conscious French auteur cinema. They also confirm the actor's trajectory from romantic-comedy co-star – in films such as *L'Etudiante* (1988), *La Crise* (1992), *Belle maman* (1999) and *Chaos* (2001) – to more intense dramatic roles, the turning point being Claire Denis's *Friday Night* (2002); the strategy was successfully pursued in the Brizé trilogy and the 2015 version of *The Diary of a Chambermaid*. In 1989, Lindon was awarded the Prix Jean Gabin as a promising young actor. Now he seems to be following in the footsteps of the great 1930s star, who was likewise famous for his charismatic, silent presence and ability to embody tragic working-class figures. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Christophe Rossignon
Philip Boëffard
Written by
Stéphane Brizé
Olivier Gorce
Director of Photography
Eric Dumont
Editor
Anne Klotz
Art Director

Valérie Saradjian
Supervising Sound Editor
Hervé Guyader
Costume Designer
Anne Dunsford
Diane Dussaud

©Nord-Ouest Films,
ARTE France Cinéma
Production Companies

Nord-Ouest Films in co-production with ARTE France Cinéma with the participation of ARTE France, Canal+, Ciné+ with the support of la Région Île-de-France, in partnership with the CNC with the participation of TS Productions

Executive Producer
Eve François Machuel

Cast
Vincent Lindon
Thierry Taugourdeau
Yves Ory
employment agency adviser
Karine de Mirbeck
Karine, Thierry's wife

Matthieu Schaller
Matthieu,
Thierry's son

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

French theatrical title
La Loi du marché
Onscreen English subtitle
The Measure of a Man

France, the present. Since losing his job because his factory closed down, 51-year-old Thierry has been unemployed for nearly two years. He is as tired of union action as he is of the various initiatives meant to help him find a new job. He works hard at perfecting his interview technique, but to no avail, and is angry at the training schemes that never lead to anything. He lives a peaceful home life with his wife Karine and their disabled adolescent son Matthieu. He struggles to make ends meet but resists the bank's suggestion

to sell the family flat. He finally gets a job as a security guard in a hypermarket, where he keeps staff and customers under surveillance via CCTV. While the job enables him to take out a bank loan to pay for a new car, he is soon uneasy at having to spy on hard-up customers and colleagues, especially when one of them commits suicide after being sacked for picking up savings coupons. When one of the women cashiers is arrested for an equally trivial offence, he removes his uniform and leaves his job without a word.

Miracles from Heaven

USA 2016

Director: Patricia Riggen

Certificate 12A 108m 53s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

The least condescending and most original faith-based film of the year – neither a retelling of the Christ story nor adapted from a forwarded email about Marine Todd, who socked an atheist professor on the jaw – *Miracles from Heaven* frequently transcends its mission to deliver 'the good news', largely thanks to some careful storytelling choices and Jennifer Garner's central performance.

Of course, the real story on which it's based is truly remarkable: Annabel (Anna) Beam, a ten-year-old from North Texas, fell 30ft on to her head while climbing a tree in her backyard, putting her extremely rare, incurable intestinal disorder into full remission. Although she was unconscious for several hours after the fall, she suffered only minor concussion. (As medical specialist Dr Nurko puts it here, the accident "reset" her nervous system, causing her intestines to function normally.) In the days after the fall, Anna told her parents that she had visited heaven and had come back only because it wasn't her time yet.

But before the film reaches that *deus ex machina* climax, there's a lot of highly relatable melodrama for mom Christy (Garner) to endure. She can only watch helplessly while her daughter experiences constant pain, and the normal rhythms of her family's life (depicted early on as cartoonishly perfect) are destroyed by the desperate cycle of managing chronic illness. Weighed down by the antiseptic blandness of hospitals and the great monetary expense that necessarily accompanies medical care in the US, Christy questions her faith when people from her church suggest that her daughter's illness is persisting because someone in the family – possibly Anna herself – hasn't properly atoned for past sins. This all too real display of snobbish piety finds a nice echo in a later montage, when we see that many of the seeming miracles that have happened during Anna's whole ordeal – an appointment with Dr Nurko that suddenly becomes available, an airline ticketing computer that malfunctions just as dad tries his last credit card – were not in fact the work of God but of people who had decided to do the right thing rather than what they were *supposed* to do. It's not enough to be a believer, you have to be a decent (or just reasonable) human being too.

It would be wrong, though, to suggest that the film trades in such subtle 'teaching moments', for director Patricia Riggen's choices often approach the baroque in several stylised montages. Some of these moments work, such as when Anna visits the Boston aquarium in a dreamlike sequence that breaks up the monotony of medical waiting rooms; others are trite flourishes inserted for the hell of it. (Queen Latifah's friendly waitress Angela, the only black person in the film who gets more than two lines, edges dangerously towards shuck and jive, particularly in a scene where she gives Anna some beaded box braids.)

Following the exact formula of her previous feature *The 33*, Riggen closes *Miracles* with a coda showing the real Beam family on their ranch, with Anna's narration presented in a dopey 'kidz' font. (She's 13 now, so cutesy backwards letters are slightly condescending.) Leaving its clunkiness aside, this finale is an odd choice given that the film is decidedly about Christy, and her



Queen Latifah, Kylie Rogers, Jennifer Garner

journey away from and back to faith. Through the tears, Christy is resolute and drives the film's action – without having to fight someone while wearing a leather catsuit or take part in a steamy sex scene – which makes her an anomaly in contemporary mainstream films. In this women's picture, God helps those who help themselves. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Joe Roth
T.D. Jakes
DeVon Franklin
Screenplay
Randy Brown
Based on the book
by Christy Beam
Director of
Photography
Checco Varese
Editor
Emma E. Hickox
Production
Designer
David R. Sandefur
Music
Carlo Siliotto
Production Mixer
Jay Meagher
Costume Designer
Mary Jane Fort

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Production

Companies
Columbia Pictures
presents in
association with
Affirm Films a
Roth Films, T.D.
Jakes, Franklin
Entertainment
production
Executive
Producers
Matthew Hirsch
Derrick Williams
Zack Roth

Cast

Jennifer Garner
Christy Beam
Kylie Rogers
Anna Beam
Martin Henderson
Kevin Beam
John Carroll Lynch

Pastor Scott
Eugenio Derbez
Dr Nurko
Queen Latifah
Angela
Brighton Sharbino
Billy Snyder
Courtney Fausler
Adelynn Beam
Wayne Péré
Ben

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing UK

North Texas, 2011. Christy Beam's daughter Anna wakes in the night with severe stomach pains and vomiting. At the hospital, the doctor tells Christy and husband Kevin that it's lactose intolerance; Christy demands more tests. Anna is diagnosed with a rare and incurable digestive disorder, and is restricted to tube feeding. At church, several parishioners suggest that Anna may not get better because someone in the family has failed to atone for past sins. Christy refuses to return to church. She and Anna fly to Boston to consult Dr Nurko, a specialist. He starts Anna on a new course of treatment. Anna and Christy stay in Boston for several months, depleting the family's finances. While on a visit home, Anna climbs a tree and falls 30ft, landing on her head. Christy and her family pray at the base of the tree. Anna suffers only a minor concussion and her disorder goes into remission.

Misconduct

USA 2015

Director: Shintaro Shimosawa

Certificate 15 105m 19s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

In years gone by, any movie that managed to corral both Al Pacino and Anthony Hopkins might have seemed more of an event. By this stage in their lives, though – Pacino is now 76, two years younger than his co-star – they have nothing left to prove professionally, and one can hardly begrudge them an untaxing payday for a few days' work adding a seasoning of prestige to this otherwise fairly ordinary thriller. In the days when there were video rental shops and actual shelves, this is the sort of movie that would have sat on them, and now looks destined, after a profile-raising theatrical splash, for the online equivalent of the same, lurking on the pages of sundry VOD providers.

In the event, the marquee names don't have much to do, and perhaps surprisingly have scant onscreen time together. Hopkins emerges with dignity intact by sticking to his familiar line in slightly distracted arrogance, playing a sleek, scheming pharma magnate. Pacino does a little less well in a fussy, self-serving turn as the maverick head of a top New Orleans law firm, with ripe, somewhat generalised Southern accent to match; there's less arm-waving than one might have feared, however, and not a 'Hoo-hah!' to be heard, though he does tear into a grandstanding finale that's ridiculously overcooked in the circumstances.

Those circumstances are a moderately watchable legal suspenser in which journeyman lead Josh Duhamel is an unscrupulous lawyer who looks set for a serious comeuppance when he falls for a come-hither from a former college girlfriend (Malin Akerman), now dating Hopkins's corporate titan, and pockets the incriminating files she's filched from the old boy's hard drive. To be fair, Duhamel's fairly anodyne screen presence fits reasonably well into the scheme of Simon Boyes and Adam Mason's script, which delivers a certain pleasurable ambivalence in wanting to see this guy put through the



Al is not lost: Al Pacino, Josh Duhamel

mincer while at the same time rooting for him to unravel the twisty plot and save as much of the day as might be practicable. There's little of substance going on, since the movie is more interested in setting up its next reversal than in wringing its hands over legal or pharmaceutical malpractice, as the title might suggest, but there's enough intrigue in the whereabouts of a certain corpse and the peculiar machinations of Lee Byung Hun's enigmatic assassin (who doesn't let terminal illness get in the way of his lethal skills on an all-black high-powered motorbike) to keep us intermittently diverted.

That said, director Shintaro Shimosawa doesn't exactly help his case by indulging in much spurious stylistic flash, including sundry meaningless sideways tracking movements, an action set piece viewed at a tilt so extreme it might be dubbed a Double Dutch Angle, and an elaborate crane shot that's a veritable road to nowhere. Meanwhile composer Federico Jusid piles on throbbing sub-bass and doom-laden strings in a not unimpressive effort that unfortunately totally overwhelms the modestly arresting narrative it's supposed to be accompanying. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ellen Wander
Written by
Simon Boyes
Adam Mason
Director of
Photography
Michael Fimognari
Edited by
Gregers Dohn
Henrik Kallberg
Production Designer
Bernardo Trujillo
Music Composed
and Conducted by
Federico Jusid
Sound Designer
Mattias Eklund
Costume Designer
Lizz Wolf

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Productions LLC
Production
Companies
Lionsgate Premiere
and Grindstone
Entertainment Group
present in association
with Film Bridge
International a Mike
and Marty production
Executive Producers

Michael T. Covell
Tony Buzbee
Amanda Seward
Darrel Casalino
Chris Brown
Fredrik Zander
Frank Bonn
Tomas Eskilsson
Eric Brenner
Gary Preisler
Barry Brooker
Stan Wertlieb
Matthew Milam

Cast

Josh Duhamel
Ben Cahill
Alice Eve
Charlotte Cahill
Malin Akerman
Emily Hynes
Lee Byung Hun
the accountant
Julia Stiles
Jane Clemente
Glen Powell
Doug Fields
Al Pacino
Charles Abrams
Anthony Hopkins
Arthur Denning

Leah McKendrick
Amy

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Bulldog Film
Distribution

New Orleans, present day. Pharmaceutical magnate Arthur Denning is in the media spotlight over claims that his firm manipulated trial results to hide their fatal consequences. Pressure on him intensifies when his much younger girlfriend Emily is kidnapped.

One week earlier: Ben Cahill, an unscrupulous lawyer at a firm that has tangled repeatedly with Denning, is contacted by old college flame Emily, who passes on details of Denning's financial skulduggery. Ben resists Emily's sexual advances but a chance nightclub encounter arouses the suspicions of his wife Charlotte, a hospital doctor, who fears for their already troubled marriage. Ben takes the inside information to his boss, Charles Abrams, and is given the chance to lead the case against Denning.

Emily is found dead; Amy, the neighbour who could identify Ben as a visitor to her apartment, survives a hit by a mystery assassin – only to be killed by Charlotte in hospital. Ben heads for a showdown with Denning, who's ready to sign a hefty financial settlement with Abrams to buy back the stolen information and put a stop to the malpractice case. Ben learns that Abrams has secretly colluded with Denning to engineer a deal whereby both sides benefit. Ben meets with Abrams, who commits suicide when cornered by the police. Charlotte reveals that she killed Emily to protect her marriage, which endures, held together by conspiratorial secrecy.

Money Monster

USA 2016
Director: Jodie Foster
Certificate 15 98m 33s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Jodie Foster's fourth film as director gains much of its adrenaline-pumped impact from playing out in real time – since almost all of its 98 minutes of action are presented as happening on continuous live TV. Occasional cutaways, to enthralled viewers in bars, cafés and even in other countries, serve to remind us of this – and right at the end, when the whole real-life drama has climaxed and a man has been shot dead, we see one customer casually going back to his game of table football, as unmoved as if he'd been watching a soap episode.

As Lee Gates, anchor of a TV programme about the financial markets, George Clooney throws himself into the role. He kicks off his show with a brief, risible dance act, complete with sparkly top hat and flanking scantily clad cuties, hinting at Lee's contempt for his audience and himself. But as he comes (to his own surprise) to empathise with Kyle (Jack O'Connell), the angry, disturbed young man who invades the studio and holds him at gunpoint, Clooney's take on the role broadens and deepens. There's effective chemistry between him and Julia Roberts as Patty, his producer, even though they're rarely on screen together – she's mostly just a voice in his earpiece. And we get a tour de force from Emily Meade as Kyle's pregnant girlfriend: brought in by the cops in the hope that she can calm him down via a TV link-up, she destroys him with a blistering two-minute tirade (again, all presented as going out live) denouncing him as an all-round hopeless dickhead and concluding, "And you cry when we fuck!"

"It's about to get complicated," Lee warns the audience at the start of his show; but it isn't really. By contrast with *The Big Short* (2015),



Blow up: George Clooney

which led us through the labyrinth of derivatives, subprime mortgages and collateralised debt obligations, *Money Monster* takes a relatively elementary view of the financial system. Walt Camby (Dominic West), the smug, hatchet-faced oligarch whose behind-the-scenes manipulations have caused his company's shares to go into meltdown, is a ruthless old-fashioned baddie not so different from Lionel Barrymore's Mr Potter in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

Not that there's any diminution of the anger; Foster and her screenwriters unmistakably sympathise with Kyle's howl, "They're stealing the country out from under us!" But the anger is laced with humour. Patty, while desperately trying to prevent Kyle from blowing up Lee, herself and the whole studio, retains enough of her producer's instinct to tell her DP to adjust his angle on the ranting, gun-toting intruder: "I'm losing him in a little shadow," she murmurs. It's moments like this, along with the sharp acting and taut pacing, that keep the film unfailingly watchable. **S**

Mon roi

France 2015
Director: Maiwenn
Certificate 15 125m 10s

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

An actress and celebrity in France (notably through her first marriage to Luc Besson), Maiwenn gained recognition as a director with *All About Actresses* (2009) and especially *Polisse* (2011), which won the Jury Prize at Cannes. Maiwenn's films, as well as her earlier stage work, are known for finding their inspiration in her personal life, and *Mon roi* is no exception. The director made no secret about the fact that the central couple's stormy relationship is in large part drawn from her own experience, both of her second marriage (to businessman Jean-Yves Le Fur) and her liaison with the rapper Joey Starr, her lead in *Polisse*. Both male figures are merged in *Mon roi*'s Georgio, a charismatic alpha male played to perfection by Vincent Cassel at his most volatile, while the actress-filmmaker Emmanuelle Bercot embodies his long-suffering yet adoring wife Tony.

Mon roi uses the framing device of Tony's stay in a rehabilitation centre following a skiing accident to piece together the couple's story in flashbacks – equating (rather insistently) her physical pain with the mental hurt of her love for Georgio. Despite the female point of view, *Mon roi* is no feminist deconstruction of abusive male behaviour. Rather, the film dwells on the borderline sadomasochistic fascination of an intelligent woman for a dangerously sexy male figure. In true Maiwenn style, this is expressed through paroxysm – an endless cycle of shouting, crying, laughing, arguing, making love, breaking glass.

Since acting awards frequently go to ostentatious performances, it is perhaps not surprising that Bercot was awarded a best actress prize at Cannes for this film: she veers between crying and laughing madly (often at things that aren't funny at all), with little in between. The perverse effect is that, although the narrative pinpoints Georgio's insufferable macho posturing, Tony's rightful indignation is undercut by Bercot's snivelling and histrionic display, especially in the face of Cassel's more nuanced and seductive performance, and the hint of redemption at the end. Additionally, the film establishes an insidious parallel between Tony's hysterical behaviour and that of Georgio's mistress Agnès (Chrystèle Saint Louis Augustin), as both women at different times attempt suicide because of him.

Mon roi in many ways illustrates the paradox of gendered filmmaking in France. Maiwenn is one of a growing band of women filmmakers in a country that boasts the highest rate of female directors in the world (currently more than 25 per cent and set to grow with gender parity at the Fémis film school). Yet, with few exceptions, their films, in the New Wave-inspired tradition of auteur cinema, privilege emotions and personal relationships over an opening up to the social world. Tony is a lawyer but we never see her work, and after the birth of her son the issue of childcare magically never rears its head. This is not simply because we are in a bourgeois-bohemian moneyed world, but because 'passion' always trumps social reality. One particularly egregious scene illustrates this: the only time we see Tony 'performing' as a barrister in her professional robes, for her

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Daniel Dubiecki Lara Alameddine George Clooney Grant Heslov	IM Global Executive Producers Kerry Orent Tim Crane Regina Sculley Ben Waisbren	Distributor Sony Pictures Releasing UK
Screenplay Jamie Linden Alan DiFiore Jim Kouf	Cast George Clooney Lee Gates Julia Roberts Patty Fenn Jack O'Connell Kyle Budwell Dominic West Walt Camby Caitriona Balfe Diane Lester Giancarlo Esposito Captain Powell Christopher Denham Ron Sprecher Lenny Venito Lenny, the cameraman Chris Bauer Lieutenant Nelson Dennis Boutsikaris Avery Goodloe CFO Emily Meade Molly Condola Rashad Bree, the assistant Aaron Yoo Won Joon	
Story Alan DiFiore Jim Kouf Director of Photography Matthew Libatique Editor Matt Chessé Production Designer Kevin Thompson Music Dominic Lewis Production Mixer Ed Novick Costume Designer Susan Lyall		
©Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. and LSC Film Corporation Production Companies TriStar Pictures presents in association with IStar Capital a Smokehouse. Allegiance Theater production A Jodie Foster film Developed in association with		
	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]	

New York, present day. At TV station FNN, host Lee Gates presents 'Money Monster', a glitzy populist show about the financial market, overseen by his producer Patty Fenn. Gates had previously hyped a stock, Ibis Clear Capital, as a sure-fire investment. Now it has abruptly dropped \$800m. The live set is invaded by a young man, Kyle Budwell, who holds a gun to Lee's head and forces him to don a suicide vest loaded with Semtex. On Lee's recommendation he invested all his money, \$60,000, in Ibis; now he demands an explanation and restitution – for him and for all the other duped investors. The police are called and set up marksmen. Patty desperately tries to contact Ibis CEO Walt Camby via his PR Diane Lester, who knows only that he's on a private jet somewhere. Ibis blames the drop on a rogue algorithm. While Lee, with Patty advising him via his earpiece, tries to talk Kyle down, Patty urges Diane to investigate further. Diane contacts the creator of the algorithm in Seoul, who tells her that it could not possibly behave like that. She detects a connection to a current strike at a South African diamond mine. The police locate Kyle's pregnant girlfriend Molly and have her talk to him via a TV link-up; she lambasts him as useless and stupid.

Walt flies in – from Johannesburg, Diane discovers. She realises that he bought heavily into the mine's fallen stock, counting on the strike ending, but it hasn't. Learning this via Patty, Lee persuades Kyle to take him to Ibis's HQ at Federal Hall. They walk through the streets, followed by the cops and a huge crowd, but en route Kyle confides that the suicide vest contains only clay. At Ibis, they confront Walt. Kyle makes Lee strap the vest on Walt, who publicly admits that he did wrong. A marksman shoots Kyle dead.



Emmanuelle Bercot, Vincent Cassel

oral examination in front of her peers, she reads a kind of love letter to her husband, an improbable choice and moreover one that doesn't demonstrate any great oratorical skill on her part.

Like its hero, and largely thanks to him, *Mon roi* is not without attraction, despite its narrative cliché of a couple who are tearing themselves apart. It's a pity that Maïwenn didn't try to renew the formula with a tougher and more empowered heroine. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alain Attal
Screenplay
Maiwenn
Etienne Comar
Director of Photography
Claire Mathon
Editor
Simon Jacquet
Art Director
Dan Weill
Original Music
Stephen Warbeck
Sound
Nicolas Provost
Agnes Ravez
Matthieu Tertois
Emmanuel Croset
Costume Designer
Marite Coutard

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du Trésor present a co-production of Les Productions du Trésor, Studiocal, France 2 Cinéma, Les Films de Batna, Arches Films, 120 Films with the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions in association with Cofinova 10, La Banque Postale Image 8, Cinéma 9, Palatine Étoile 12 with the support of La Région Île-de-France in partnership with the CNC A film by Maiwenn
Executive Producer
Xavier Amblard

Cast
Vincent Cassel
Georgio Milevski
Emmanuelle Bercot
Marie-Antoinette Jézéquel, 'Tony'

Louis Garrel
Solal
Isild Le Besco
Babeth
Chrystèle Saint
Louis Augustin
Agnès
Norman Thavaud
Nico
Nabil Kechouhen
Nabil
Amanda Added
Amanda
Abdelghani Addala
Abdel
Jibril Bentchakal
Jibril

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Studiocal Limited

France, the present. While she is immobilised in a convalescent home on the south-west coast, recovering from a skiing injury, lawyer Tony reflects on her life. Through a series of flashbacks we see her falling head over heels for the charismatic Georgio, their tumultuous relationship, the birth of their son Simbad, their gradual estrangement and their divorce. The film contrasts their respective worlds. Tony has a prestigious job and is from a stable family; her calm brother Solal and his girlfriend Babeth give her moral support throughout. By contrast, Georgio, a restaurateur, drinks and takes drugs, conducts louche affairs and surrounds himself with a crowd of hangers-on from the world of fashion. His lying and womanising, and in particular his lingering affair with the highly strung model Agnès, who at one point tries to kill herself, contribute to Tony's own suicide attempt and the break-up of the couple's relationship. Nevertheless, Tony cannot totally detach herself from Georgio. At the end of the film, the couple visit family therapists who compliment them on the good progress of the seven-year-old Simbad. Tony looks adoringly at Georgio.

Mother's Day

USA 2016

Director: Garry Marshall

Certificate 12A 117m 44s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Within the first five minutes of *Mother's Day*, Garry Marshall's third holiday-themed ensemble comedy and his *cri de coeur*, Meghan Trainor has been heard wailing "You might have a mom/She might be the bomb" and a moppet has told an exasperated Jennifer Aniston, "It's called freeballing, mom." These are not things that might conceivably happen in a movie that will eventually turn out to have artistic merit, and Marshall is only getting warmed up. But to *Mother's Day*'s eternal credit, it is no run-of-the-mill piece of dispensable junk: it is so brazen in its attempts to manipulate unearned emotion and so wildly miscalculated in comic effect that it demands to be looked upon with a degree of awe. I barely blinked during the nearly two-hour running time and left the theatre reeling, probably looking to all the world as if I was on some new designer drug. In a sense I was: I was high on *Mother's Day*.

The movie lays its scene in Atlanta, Georgia, mostly in the anonymous suburbs. Atlanta has one of the largest African-American populations of any US city, a fact that is not much represented in the casting of *Mother's Day*. The film does inadvertently capture the fact that Atlanta is also one of the country's less picturesque major cities – there is an establishing shot of a downtown Four Seasons hotel at midday that might be the blandest image I have ever seen in a studio film. The cinematography is bright, so as to be legible to the senescent audience Marshall caters to.

While avoiding the kind of potty humour that might upset the Senior Discount crowd, the movie does manage to be offensive to blacks, whites, Indians, little people, large people, heterosexuals, homosexuals, Texans, Bronxites, Britons, interior designers, the Marine Corps and humanity at large. The sparse audience that I watched it with laughed exactly twice, first when one of the Aniston character's children came on stage during a talent show wearing his lion costume backwards so as



Mum's the word: Jennifer Aniston, Kate Hudson

to make the tail resemble an erection, then during the closing-credits blooper reel, which includes one somewhat poetic image of Julia Roberts staring into the middle distance while she waits for a train to pass in the background, counting down the seconds until she can be back in the hotel. There are plenty of other bloopers scattered throughout the film, which is quite clearly an editing-room salvage job, with some glaring patched-in dubbing and bizarrely incongruous cutaways.

Roberts, playing an aloof home-shopping guru who is unexpectedly reunited with her long-lost daughter (Britt Robertson), manages a couple of actually moving close-ups that, given what's going on around her, may be enough to qualify her as one of the greatest screen actresses of all time. Kate Hudson coasts on her charisma; Margo Martindale, playing Hudson's bigoted trailer-trash mother, works well below the level of her talents; and Jason Sudeikis, playing a widowed father of two, works at exactly the level of his, which is to say that he is an absolute dead zone. His deceased wife, as viewed briefly on a cherished videotape, is played by a cameoing Jennifer Garner, and the most succinct description of *Mother's Day* I can give is that it's the sort of movie that thinks throwing you a Jennifer Garner cameo is some kind of treat. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mike Karz
Wayne Rice
Daniel Diamond
Brandt Andersen
Howard Burd
Mark DiSalle
Screenplay
Anya Kochoff Romano
Matt Walker
Tom Hines
Story
Lily Hollander
Matt Walker
Tom Hines
Garry Marshall
Director of

Photography
Charles Minsky
Edited by
Bruce Green
Robert Malina
Production Designer
Missy Stewart
Music
John Debney
Production Sound Mixer
Todd Weaver
Costume Designers
Marilyn Vance
Beverly Woods

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Production Companies
Diamond Pictures presents a Wayne Rice/Gulfstream Pictures production in association with Aperture Media Partners, Mayday Movies, Triad Film Works, Beatnik Films
A film by Garry Marshall
Completed with assistance from the Georgia Film, Music & Digital

Entertainment Office
Executive Producers
Kevin Frakes
Ankur Rungta
Matthew Hooper
Jared D. Underwood
Danny Mandel
Rodger May
Fred Grimm
Bill Heavener
Scott Lipsky
Leon Corcos
Deborah E. Chaussé
William Bindley
Howard Gilden
Tedd Johnson

Cast
Jennifer Aniston
Sandy
Kate Hudson
Jesse
Julia Roberts
Miranda
Jason Sudeikis
Bradley
Britt Robertson
Kristin
Timothy Olyphant
Henry
Hector Elizondo
Lance Wallace
Jack Whitehall

Zack
Margo Martindale
Flo
Jennifer Garner
2nd Lt. Dana Barton
Sarah Chalke
Gabi
Shay Mitchell
Tina
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Lionsgate UK

his first Mother's Day without his late wife, and proposes that he and his two daughters shouldn't celebrate. Kristin, who has a child with her boyfriend Zack, a would-be stand-up comic, has avoided marriage because of unresolved issues relating to her own adoption as a baby; she resolves to meet her birth mother – who turns out to be Miranda. Miranda oversees Kristin and Zack's wedding. Sandy learns to share her children with Tina. Jesse and Gabi's parents come to accept their children's lives. Bradley lets his daughters celebrate Mother's Day, and begins a flirtation with Sandy.

The Nice Guys

USA 2015
Director: Shane Black
Certificate 15 115m 43s

See Feature
on page 46

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Chivalry isn't dead in the films of Shane Black, but it has a spiral fracture in its arm and electrodes hooked up to its testicles. In 2005's wonderfully wisecracking *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* and the new 70s-set *The Nice Guys*, the director conjures up a Los Angeles crawling with lost girls and the boys who try their best – such as it is – to protect them. More often than not, though, they have a hard time protecting themselves. As private investigator Holland March, Ryan Gosling evokes the knight-errant posture of Jake Gittes with a bandaged hand instead of a gauzed-up nose, and the labyrinthine corruption plot he unravels nods to *Chinatown* (1974) at various intervals without bogging down in homage. Black's pace is too relentless for reverence.

Although it's being sold as a buddy-action comedy like Black's scripts for *Lethal Weapon* and *The Last Boy Scout*, *The Nice Guys* is mostly Gosling's show; his reluctant partnership with freelance bruiser Jackson Healy (Russell Crowe) is a matter of mutual convenience for the characters and the filmmaker. Both men are searching for a young woman embroiled in some badness involving a porn producer whose collaborators keep turning up dead, and while both have a claim to the case, it's March – mourning a recently deceased wife and trying to raise a precocious teenage daughter (welcome discovery Angourie Rice) – who Black invests with genuine pathos and eccentricity. It helps that Gosling, recently on glowering autopilot in his films for Nicolas Winding Refn, rises to the occasion with an inspired comic performance – he inhabits March's soused, beta-male weakness with the commitment of a character actor and the vocal and physical agility of a true slapstick clown. He should do more comedies.

March gets knocked around a lot in *The Nice Guys*, so much so that his apparent indestructibility becomes a plot device (with Gosling flying around the screen as a literal



LA stories: Russell Crowe, Margaret Qualley

running joke). Crowe, meanwhile, doles out the poundings, looking at least a bit more relaxed than usual. Their easy rapport aside, Black's achievement is to create a palpably dangerous onscreen world spacious enough to cultivate both sadism and tragedy – including at least one truly shocking death – as well as the kinds of visual and verbal non sequiturs that launched *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* into the comic stratosphere.

These include a youth-cult sit-in where the protesters are repeatedly distracted from their radical tableaux; a Hollywood Hills party featuring prostitutes as Kubrickian decor (sexism served up and critiqued in the same salacious shot); and a bit with a corpse that treads on Looney Tunes territory. Black's most audacious sight gag involves Richard Nixon, and there are other signifiers of post-Watergate malaise, including gas-station fist fights and, even more chillingly, billboards advertising *Jaws 2* and *Airport '77*. It might seem a bit rich for the guy who got wealthy making *Iron Man 3* to link the proliferation of sequels to a city's – and a country's – moral torpor, but as *The Nice Guys* is exactly the kind of enjoyably incorrect genre film being edged out by Marvel's multiplex dominance, it's probably better to give Black the benefit of the doubt. 🍷

Notes on Blindness

United Kingdom/France/USA 2015
Directors: Peter Middleton, James Spinney

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Part diary of grief, part philosophical enquiry, *Notes on Blindness* follows theologian John Hull's attempts to mourn and make sense of the loss of his sight in 1980, shortly after the birth of his second child. He initially responded with furious denial, pouring his energies into the question of how to function as a blind academic. Only once the practicalities had been taken care of did his focus turn to the matter of blindness itself. How to be a husband when blind? A father? How to be a son to parents who have always known you as sighted? His wife Marilyn feared he would reach a point where she couldn't follow: "Shall I scratch my eyes out?" she asks. "Shall I come with you into this world?"

At moments of high tension such as this, the two speak as if from different times: her narrative is in the present tense, his in the past, as if he is conversing with a memory. Of course, that is to some extent precisely what he is doing, since his mental pictures of his family are frozen in time. Excerpts from Hull's audio diary, latter-day interviews and family recordings are placed in the mouths of actors who re-enact events from the past; it's a device that calls to mind Clio Barnard's *The Arbor* (2010) but here has a more elegiac effect. Production designer Damien Creagh provides a gorgeous, burnished recreation of the late 70s and early 80s, while cinematographer Gerry Floyd captures how difficult it is to remember details. Characters are framed so that we don't see their eyes but only their mouths, speaking words that don't quite fit.

The synaesthetic slippage between sight and sound is thus intelligently rendered, and quietly effective. But the techniques deployed lack any real revelatory force. The off-kilter racking and blurred close-ups of tactile details – net curtains, wallpaper, the soft down of a newborn's head – are familiar enough from such sensual cinema as Claire Denis's *Friday Night* (2002). Nevertheless there are some extraordinary moments in *Notes on Blindness*, which emerge from the hidden spaces of Hull's subconscious. At one point, as we watch a ferocious flood engulf him, he explains that he is not blind in his dreams – every time he rouses from sleep he loses his sight once more. He wakes feeling arid, thirsty for sight, and this thirst is quenched to some degree by the arrival of rain, which "brings out the contours of the world" and creates an "audible environment". If only it could rain all the time, even indoors, he opines, at which point the filmmakers cut to droplets pelting pots, pans and carpets in Hull's home.

Scenes like this are brimming with catharsis. Of course, these things – water, rebirth, cleansing – are ripe with religious associations. Yet it is only really as the film draws to a close that Hull turns to the question of faith. How to be a believer when blind? Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989) featured a rabbi who had lost his sight; to him, blindness was a gift, one that only strengthened his faith and was therefore, in Allen's words, "the best gift anyone could hope for". Hull is more ambivalent: it's a gift, he agrees, but not one he'd want for himself or his children. Still, when asked by his son why God has chosen this fate for him, he responds that the question is not "why me?" but "why not me?" Not "why I

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Joel Silver
Written by
Shane Black
Anthony Bagarozzi
Director of Photography
Philippe Rousselot
Edited by
Joel Negron
Production Designer
Richard Bridgeland
Music Composed by
John Ottman
David Buckley
Production Sound Mixer
Peter J. Devlin
Costume Designer
Kym Barrett

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Production Companies
A Silver Pictures production in association with Waypoint Entertainment

In association with
LipSync LLP
Completed with assistance from the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office
Executive Producers
Ken Kao
Hal Sadoff
Anthony Bagarozzi
Alex Walton
Michael J. Malone

Cast
Russell Crowe
Jackson Healy
Ryan Gosling
Holland March
Angourie Rice
Holly March
Margaret Qualley
Amelia Kuttner
Matt Bomer
John Boy
Yaya DaCosta
Tally
Keith David

older guy
Beau Knapp
Blueface
Lois Smith
Mrs Glenn
Murielle Telio
Misty Mountains
Gil Gerard
Bergen Paulsen
Daisy Tahan
Jessica
Kim Basinger
Judith Kuttner

Dolby Digital Colour by
Technicolor
[2.35:1]


Distributor
Icon Film Distribution

Los Angeles, 1977. After the apparent death of porn star Misty Mountains, private eye Holland March is hired by her aunt, who is convinced that Misty is still alive. March starts by looking for a missing girl named Amelia, who resembles the dead woman. He's attacked in his home by Jackson Healy, who's been paid by Amelia to get March off her trail. The two men realise that Amelia may be in danger and work together to reconstruct her movements, which involved a collaboration with a porn producer on a film that has also disappeared. At a Hollywood party, the men discover the body of the producer and save Amelia from hired goons. Amelia's mother, who works for the Department of Justice, offers them even more money for her daughter's safe return. Amelia reappears and explains that the porn film was made as a political protest and that her mother, in collusion with corrupt auto manufacturers, is killing everybody who worked on it to keep it quiet. A hired assassin kills Amelia. March and Healy go to an auto show, where the last member of the porn shoot is trying to screen the film and expose the conspiracy. A shootout ensues, during which the film plays in front of a huge audience. March and Healy emerge as the last men standing. They decide to go into business together.



Divine sight: Dan Skinner

have I got it?" but "what am I going to do with it?"

The answer, it seems, is to keep hoping, to work at bridging the divide between blind and sighted in whatever ways one can. In its small imperfect way, *Notes on Blindness* is a laudable attempt to do just that. 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Mike Brett
Jo-Jo Ellison
Steve Jamison
Peter Middleton
James Spinney
Alex Usborne

Written by

Peter Middleton
James Spinney

Director of Photography

Gerry Floyd

Editor

Julian Quantrill

Production Designer

Damien Creagh

Music

James Ewers

Supervising Sound Editor

Joakim Sundström

Costume Designer

Julia Drummond-Haig

@Into Darkness Limited/The British Film Institute

Production Companies

Creative England, Impact Partners, Arte France, BBC

Storyville and BFI present an Archer's Mark production

Produced in association with Fee Fie Foe Films and 104 Films

In co-production with Agat Films & Cie

With the support of Cinereach, Procirep-ANGOA, New York

Times OpDocs, Britdoc, Arte France, BBC

Storyville, Impact Partners, Creative England

Made with the

support of the BFI's Film Fund

Executive Producers

Lizzie Francke
Richard Holmes

Martine Saada
Mark Edwards

Kate Townsend
Dan Cogan

Jason Spingarn-Koff

Philippa Kowarsky

The Silent Storm


United Kingdom 2014

Director: Corinna McFarlane

Certificate 15 102m 27s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"To expect happiness in this life is a form of arrogance," island minister Balor McNeil (Damian Lewis) tells a distressed wife (Kate Dickie). Compassion, it seems, doesn't rank high in the doctrines of this particular church, which would make the Wee Frees look like sybarites. With his own wife Aislin (Andrea Riseborough) Balor is even less indulgent. "You are a failed mother and a failed woman," he harangues her, "and you will rot in the belly of hell!"

Balor, one gathers, doesn't do subtlety, and nor does writer-director Corinna McFarlane, whose feature debut this is. Further emphasis, were it needed, is provided by an impassioned and largely wordless choir, emoting fervently at every turn. (A little more silence would do this storm no harm.) Quite how actors of the calibre of Lewis (whose 'Scots' accent recalls Groundskeeper Willie in *The Simpsons*) and Riseborough (wandering vocally from Reykjavik to Warsaw) got involved in this farrago is anyone's guess. At least Ross Anderson, as the angel-faced Glaswegian delinquent who's implausibly quartered on them, sounds authentically Scottish. That apart, only the beauty of the Mull landscapes offers respite from the stereotyped characters and sledgehammer dialogue. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nicky Bentham

Written by

Corinna McFarlane

Director of Photography

Ed Rutherford

Editor

Kate Baird

Production Designer

Matthew Button

Composer

Alastair Caplin

Sound Recordist

Paul Munro

Costume Designer

Sharon Long

Developed with the assistance of Eon Productions and British Film Company

Supported by Film Agency for Wales, National Lottery

through the Arts Council of Wales

Executive Producers

Barbara Broccoli
Michael G. Wilson

Steve Milne
Christian Eisenbeiss

Hani Farsi
Goran R. Lazovich

Milan Markovic
Jerome Booth

Serena Fakhre
Peter Scarf

Damian Lewis
Adam Partridge

Marc Samuelson

Tale of Tales

Italy/France/United Kingdom 2015

Director: Matteo Garrone

Certificate 15 133m 38s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

It never rains but it pours in the world of the fairytale; there are no half measures, only extremes — surpassing beauty, surpassing riches, acmes of lack and ugliness. Death, in monstrous guises (as wolf, witch, starvation), squats at every fork in the road. The turbulence of the fairytale is amplified in this first English-language feature from director Matteo Garrone. *Tale of Tales* braids together three stories based on only a fistful of the 50 collected by 17th-century Neapolitan poet Giambattista Basile, and this braiding results in the fables' fireworks going off in a climactic sequence.

The three fables, being not as often adapted as 'Puss in Boots' or 'Sleeping Beauty' (both of which were collected in Basile's *Pentamerone* before being seized on and altered to tastes by the French Charles Perrault and the German Brothers Grimm), are well chosen. They are, in the words of Goldilocks, "just right"; even for those viewers to whom they are new, they are cosily familiar. The particulars of the stories' plots may take us by surprise (a flea the size of a sow, a crone pitched from a palace window and so on) but the fairy-logic or *illogic* — the moral and magic reasoning — belongs to a macro-pattern that is household.

One story pits a mother's love against the bond between identical brothers. Another tells of a king's affection for a giant flea, which so absorbs him that he marries off his daughter to an ogre, who hauls her to his escarpment home and sets her down among the bones of breakfasts past. And in the last story, a satyr king enters into a sexual bargain with the unseen owner of a singing voice that works on him like Spanish fly, never guessing that she's *not* the supple, nubile girl she sounds like but one of the least prepossessing of his subjects, the lined, liver-spotted Dora.

Reacting to the film's premiere at last year's Cannes, some complained that its three tales were artlessly tossed together. I can't agree; for me, the film's open weave is an evocation of the oral tradition wherein all fairytales have their beginnings. There is something conversational, suitably pedestrian, about Garrone's loose, informal structure. By omitting to fit a framing device (an omniscient narrator, say) or knock in signposts (intertitles along the lines of, "Meanwhile, in a nearby kingdom"), he reminds us that folklore is first spoken and only later set down on the page. In other words, *Tale of Tales* tells itself.

What serves as a fixing agent instead are the film's authentic locations (castles in the south of Italy and in Sicily), the medieval flavour of its costumes and, above all, the eye-watering opulence of Peter Suschitzky's photography. Detailed (and gory) as a Doré engraving, vibrant as a Bilibin illustration, the film's every frame has the gold-leaf grandeur of the kinds of colour plate one finds in a fairytale compendium. In such volumes, these plates are spaced apart; *Tale of Tales* looks as if plate after perfect plate has been bound together with catgut. The images hang in the mind long after the film has finished, among them the medium shot of Bebe Cave's Princess Violet, returned to her father's castle a widow, wearing, in place of the pearls and sausage-curls she wore before, the





A rare treat: Salma Hayek

☛ drying blood of her murdered husband and a heavy look of womanhood.

Though one wouldn't guess it from the above precis, the women of *Tale of Tales* fare well, prevailing either by their handling of adversity or through the admirable heat of their feelings. As such, this film is as near a translation of Angela Carter's feminist re-imaginings of folktales and fairytales as I have come across. *Tale of Tales* shares not only the violence and eroticism of Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, but also its self-reflexive sense of humour, as when Salma Hayek's queen prompts a black-cloaked necromancer, "Be less

mysterious, come to the point!" Further fastening the film together are those things you cannot see but feel: a director's assurance, and a directness to the presentation of elements of fantasy. The film does not labour the point; it is almost offhand in its provision of magic, of which there is plenty and some of it surplus to the story.

The fairytale realm that Garrone creates here is as frightening as it is glamorous; there is as much to recommend it (exotic pets, erotic opportunity, landscapes to take the breath away) as there is to make a viewer relieved she isn't enmeshed in its matrix. 🍷

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Matteo Garrone
Jeremy Thomas
Jean Labadie
Anne-Laure Labadie

Story and Screenplay

Edoardo Albinati
Ugo Chiti
Matteo Garrone
Massimo Gaudioso
Loosely based on
The Tale of Tales by
Giambattista Basile

Director of Photography

Peter Suschitzky

Editor

Marco Spoletini
Production Designer
Dimitri Capuani

Original Score

Alexandre Desplat
Sound Design & Sound Mixing
Leslie Shatz
Costume Design
Massimo Cantini
Parrini
Visual Effects
Makinarium

©Archimede

S.r.l., Le Pacte

Production Companies

Matteo Garrone,
RAI Cinema, Jeremy
Thomas present
in association with
Harway Films, New
Sparta Films, Le Pacte

with financial
contribution from
The Ministry for
Heritage and Cultural
Activities and Tourism
Direzione Generale
per il Cinema
with a contribution
from Eurimages,
Apulia Film
Commission a film
by Matteo Garrone
Produced by
Archimede and
Le Pacte
with RAI Cinema,
Recorded Picture
Company
in association with
Garnet S.P.A.,
Banco Popolare di

Vicenza S.C.P.A.,
Morato Pane
S.P.A., Amer S.P.A.,
Gruppo Barletta
S.P.A., Cinefinance
Italia S.R.L.
with the support of
the Regione Lazio
Fondo Regionale
per il Cinema e
L'audiovisivo
Supported by
Eurimages
Executive Producers
Alessio Lazzareschi
Peter Watson
Nicki Hattingh
Anne Shehan
Sheryl Crown

Cast

Salma Hayek
Queen of Longtrellis
Vincent Cassel
King of Strongcliff
Toby Jones
King of Highhills
Shirley Henderson
Imma
Hayley Carmichael
Dora
Bebe Cave
Violet
Stacy Martin
young Dora
Christian Lees
Elias
Jonah Lees
Jonah
Guillaume Delaunay
ogre

Alba Rohrwacher

mother circus
performer
Massimo Ceccherini
father circus
performer
John C. Reilly
King of Longtrellis

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Curzon Artificial Eye

Italian theatrical title
Il racconto dei racconti

In the first of three fairytales, a king and queen, wishing for a child, are instructed by a necromancer to butcher a sea monster and have its heart cooked by a virgin for the queen to eat. The king is killed. The queen and the virgin give birth to identical boy babies. Sixteen years later, the queen, jealous of the bond between her son Prince Elias and the virgin's son Jonah, forces the latter from the palace. Later, learning that Jonah is in danger, Elias flies to his rescue. The queen strikes a bargain with the necromancer: her life for Elias's safety. Elias defends Jonah from a bat-like fiend, which, when slain, is revealed to be the dead queen.

In the second story, a king becomes obsessed with an oversized pet flea. When it dies, he has it skinned, and holds a tournament: the man who can identify what creature the skin belongs to may marry his daughter

Violet. An ogre wins Violet for his wife, and carries her to his cave. She is rescued by a troupe of entertainers but the ogre tracks them down and slays all but Violet; fooling him with tenderness, she slits his throat. She returns with his head to her father, and is made queen.

In the third tale, a king is enticed by a singing voice whose owner refuses to be seen: the singer, Dora, and her sister Imma are old and ugly. On condition that she can visit in darkness, unseen, Dora agrees to come to the king's bedchamber. He, breaking their agreement post-coitus, recoils at the sight of her and she is thrown from his window. Caught in tree branches below, she is found by a witch and transformed into a beautiful young woman. The king, finding her there, falls in love with her and they wed. Imma has herself played in the mistaken belief that this will cause her to be transformed like Dora.

Versus The Life and Films of Ken Loach

Director: Louise Osmond

Reviewed by Richard Combs

Louise Osmond launches her documentary on Ken Loach with what must be the unlikely set of images. We're plunged into a multicoloured extravaganza: fairground lights swirling and rotating; a Ferris wheel that has the magical grace of the space station in 2001. Then Loach's own voice pulls the fairground back into a perspective that's more what we'd expect from his 50-year career of filmmaking: "If you say how the world is, that should be enough. Just the sense of simple connection between people, just being..."

Next we hear the voice of Tony Garnett, Loach's one-time collaborator and producer, reinforcing what is probably everyone's sense of Loach's cinema, emphasising the political behind that simple connection: "Ken wants to make films about how the world is actually run." Or, as Loach puts it, in terms of a rule of drama: "If you make films about people's lives, I think politics is essential." Garnett pictures "two powerful forces at work in society and they're enemies". This leads into a montage of press headlines, which are as divided on Loach's politics as the documentary's title suggests: "the great crusader" versus "repulsive little films", "master of realism" versus "barking mad Marxist".

But it's not that the verbal testimony gives the lie to that initial immersion in the fairground. The two just operate out of different spaces: a pushmi-pullyu of space that finally doesn't allow Loach's films to settle into any fixed perspective, and that creates an enigma about what we take to be one of the simplest, most direct, self-explanatory kinds of cinema we have. And Osmond has been able, slyly, to tease an enigma out of straightforward biographical material, because the fairground isn't a lie: talking about his childhood in Nuneaton and his father, who was a foreman in a machine-tool factory, Loach mentions the family's one week's holiday a year, taken amid the swirling lights of Blackpool.

Loach's father was a working-class Tony ("Only later did I realise how right-wing he was") with a great pride in craftsmanship that had its own showy side: he had a dagger made in the factory when the young Loach was in a school production of *Macbeth*. There's a 'lives of performers' aspect to the working-class narratives in Loach's films: the fragility and vulnerability of the protagonists in *Kes* (1969), built according to Loach around the central image of "the bird which flies free and the boy who is trapped", and in two of his productions with Carol White, *Cathy Come Home* (1966) and *Poor Cow* (1967), from which the actress herself perhaps emerged as the most vulnerable element.

Vulnerability in an actor, Loach says, "is a really important quality, but then you have a responsibility not to exploit that". A discussion of White's fate leads to a transition (like the fairground opening) into the darkened world of an actual theatre and Loach's confession that "theatres have a magic about them". Even in Nuneaton, "in the middle of the Midlands", as he testifies, a theatre company often visited, and Loach would go and hang around. Loach's professional beginnings were as an actor, as an understudy in a revue written by Peter Cook, *One Over the Eight*, and he was, as his wife Lesley

The Violators

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Helen Walsh
Certificate 15 100m 30s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

A female body is a dangerous thing to have in Helen Walsh's tough, tense debut, whose content at once suggests recent real-life scandals around the sexual abuse of disadvantaged adolescent girls in the north of England and much older novelistic tropes whereby a woman may be saved or damned by other people's designs on her. Like Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, teenage school dropout Shelly (Lauren McQueen) possesses a beauty that in theory offers her a ticket out of poverty and disadvantage, but in practice only renders her more conspicuous to predators. The most obvious of these is local pawnbroker and hard man Mikey (Stephen Lord), who isn't about to let the fact that Shelly is only 15 stand in his way; but as the film's title indicates, those who have staked her out as a potential conquest are multiple. We don't learn exactly why her father Eugene (Sean McKee) is in prison, but we see that she fears him profoundly, and the brief flashback glimpse we get of their relationship is charged with discomfort and unfatherly salaciousness. And then there's Rachel (Brogan Ellis): product of a distinctly different social background, one that involves fencing lessons, couture clothes and applications to Cambridge University, but oppressively keen to haunt Shelly's hangouts and offer her gifts in exchange for companionship.

We're kept guessing as to the true intentions of this trio of actual and potential malfeasants by a plot that twists and twists again, in the process toying with a number of genre frameworks for Shelly and her predicament. With her frightening father on the loose, and Mikey apparently offering protection only in exchange for sex, will Shelly be sacrificed to others' appetites, a




I, Ken Loach

remembers, a very self-conscious performer: "the sort of actor he wouldn't dream of employing".

By the time of *Cathy Come Home*, Loach had evolved his seamless naturalism ("If you were watching a documentary you'd believe it, so that's our standard"); encouraging the actors rehearsing his new film, the Palme d'Or-winning *I, Daniel Blake*, he says, "If you do it realistically, it sounds right." And his politics seem to have evolved from the style, rather than vice versa. Garnett says that at the time of *Kes*, Loach "was not political", and that, among others, it was the writer Jim Allen (with whom Loach first worked on the TV play *The Big Flame* in 1969) who enabled

"another political step to the left". He adds: "I think Ken's politics gelled in that early work with Jim and me... and you won't shift him now."

It's as if Loach's highly evolved naturalism and sympathetic way of working with actors – a sensitivity that, as is occasionally remarked, goes along with a steely determination to get what he wants – must unproblematically deliver the world as it is. Which leaves the suspicion that there are spaces still unmapped behind the Loach technique. Garnett calls Loach "the most leftwing, subversive director this country's probably ever had". Which may well be, but he is also one of the most mysterious. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Rebecca O'Brien
Director of
Photography
Roger Chapman
Editor
Joby Gee
Composer
Roger Goula

Sound
Olly Astles-Jones

Production
Companies
BBC Films and the
BFI present a Sixteen
Films production
Executive Producers

Lizzie Francke
Christine Langan
Joe Oppenheimer

With
Rebecca O'Brien
Tony Garnett
Neil Dunn

Tony Selby
Paul Lavery
Alan Parker
Cillian Murphy
Chris Menges
Hayley Squires
Dave Johns
David Webster
Ricky Tomlinson

Liz Forgan
Melvyn Bragg
Emma Loach
Hannah Loach
Max Stafford-Clark
Gabriel Byrne
Jim Loach
Stephen Loach
Sheila Hancock

Lesley Loach
Derek Malcolm
Crissy Rock

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

Documentary. Ken Loach is seen preparing to shoot his new film, *I, Daniel Blake*, in Newcastle. Despite having announced his retirement in 2014, the 80-year-old director has returned to filmmaking, galvanised by the re-election of the Conservative government in 2015. The polarised opinions about Loach's films in the British press are summarised, and his long-term associate Tony Garnett describes the contradiction between his unflinching leftwing attitudes and quiet, gentlemanly manner. Garnett and Loach worked together in the 1960s on the BBC 'Wednesday Play' series ('Up the Junction', 'Cathy Come Home') before Loach made his first feature films ('Poor Cow', 'Kes'). Loach describes growing up in Nuneaton and his early fascination with theatre. He

talks about responding to the vulnerability of actors, though Garnett also insists on his ruthlessness and self-belief. Loach's political beliefs were strengthened through working with the writer Jim Allen (on 'The Big Flame' on TV and later the films 'Hidden Agenda', 'Raining Stones' and 'Land and Freedom'). In the 1970s, Loach found himself out of favour at the BBC, and his feature-film career was blocked. He turned to documentaries, but a series critical of the trade-union movement ('Questions of Leadership') was cancelled by Channel 4 and a programme on the music and poetry of the Miners' Strike was not aired. In the 1990s, Loach began winning prizes at European film festivals, culminating in his first Palme d'Or for 'The Wind That Shakes the Barley' in 2006.



Looks could kill: Lauren McQueen

Where to Invade Next.

USA 2015
Director: Michael Moore
Certificate 15 120m 17s

children (she threatens a girl who makes fun of her 'foreign' blue eyes). This is a darker version of the tween-misery familiar from *Inside Out* (2015): Anna's prickliness stems from real hurt, even self-loathing. Her depression is expressed sensitively in lingering visuals of her endlessly hiding away, even scouring out the other children from her sketch of a playground. A staple theme of YA literature, it's still a bold choice in an animated feature. So too is the film's presentation of the romantic female friendship that Anna forges swiftly with the blonde Marnie (Arimura Kasumi), the here-then-gone inhabitant of the grand Marsh House that fascinates Anna. Through a midnight picnic and rowing lesson, and a moonlit waltz on a party terrace, the girls' involvement is intense. Marnie admits, "I love you more than any girl I've ever known." Speculation has rumbled through Tumblr concerning the film's possible lesbian subtext. But like everything else in *When Marnie Was There*, the girls' relationship is complex and many-layered, simultaneously embodying the tomboy and girly-girl archetypes of anime, and harking back to a more innocent era.

Using the same kind of dreamlike, hazy mood, the film also layers and elides the story's teasing time-slip elements, buffing up the past glories of Marsh House in idealised bright colours but making the present tangible, warm, even scuffed. Production designer Taneda Yohei (usually a live-action specialist – he designed *The Hateful Eight*) brings in pleasing levels of close-up detail. Finding a sharp beauty in the everyday, the animation lingers on laundry snapping in the breeze, festival lanterns glowing, an oozing breakfast egg. Yonebayashi provided enchanting natural-world detail in *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010), but here he and his crew nimbly convey how Anna's senses are gradually awoken. You get the bulge and squeak of cutting into a huge tomato, the feel of sea wind across the face, a rainstorm charging like a bull around the inside of a ruined silo. The initial greys and beiges of Sapporo city give way to a pastel palette of subtle blues and shaded or sunlit greens to make emotionally expressive seaside landscapes.

All this quiet beauty has its price, which is paid in plot shortcomings. After a necessarily slow start exploring Anna's misery, the film makes neat, unsettling darts between past and present, which leave the question of where Marnie comes from and who she is nicely fluid. Its story stretches Anna to breaking point between two worlds, like a quieter, less Freudian version of *Paperhouse* (1988). But in its final determination to wrap everything up neatly, the film dumps a tumble of explanation in our laps, including one key revelation that sits oddly with the film's heady, girlish infatuations.

Despite the absence of the kind of imaginative spectacle or battle sequences that galvanised *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *When Marnie Was There* is expertly atmospheric. Its action is all contained within its emotional ebb and flow, as fierce as the tides that lap at Marsh House. Poignant and nuanced, it has a delicate melancholy that makes it a more than worthy last offering, should the rumours of an end to Studio Ghibli in-house theatrical features prove true. **S**



Trumped: Michael Moore

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

The sarcastic title of Michael Moore's latest documentary suggests it's a critique of American foreign policy that anticipates how the next president might further US geopolitical interests. Moore first mentioned the long-gestating film, which he had shot with a small crew in secrecy, on a live Twitter Periscope video last July. He hinted that it had been partially inspired by his disapproval of the US fighting "an infinite war" that enabled private companies to secure lucrative defence contracts under the aegis of the military-industrial complex. Though he made the announcement six weeks after Donald Trump declared he was running for president, it doesn't follow that Moore named the movie with Trump's aggressive xenophobia in mind. Given Trump's wavering on the 2003 invasion of Iraq, for example, prominent pundits have conjectured

that Hillary Clinton is the more hawkish candidate. (Her Democratic rival Bernie Sanders, who opposed the war, would be less likely than Clinton or Trump to invade anywhere next.)

The 'infinite war' issue was slightly misleading since Moore only addresses it on screen during a fake Pentagon meeting (depicted with stills) in which he tells the generals it's time to rest the armed forces so that he can conduct his one-man 'invasions'. Admittedly Moore's contrasting of a French salary statement (which details where every tax payment goes) with a US equivalent (which denotes only the social security payment) prompts his disclosure that 59.57 per cent of American dollars are spent on the military. Otherwise this typically discursive vehicle for the liberal activist-satirist everyman and scourge of the right – a better-organised film than 2009's *Capitalism: A Love Story*



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Tia Lessin
Carl Deal
Michael Moore
Written by
Michael Moore
Camera
Richard Rowley
Jayme Roy

Editors

Pablo Preenza
T. Woody Richman
Tyler H. Walk
Field Sound
Recordists
Francisco Latorre
Hilary Stewart

©Michael Moore

Production Companies
North End Films
presents in
association with IMG
Films a Dog Eat Dog
Films production
A film by Michael

Moore

Film Extracts
Talladega Nights
The Ballad of Ricky Bobby (2006)
Triumph des Willens/Triumph of the Will (1935)
The Wizard of

Oz (1939)

Executive Producers
Mark Shapiro
Will Staeger
Rod Bilesen

In Colour

[L781]
Part-subtitled

Distributor

Dogwoof

Documentarist Michael Moore fantasises that he is telling America's Joint Chiefs of Staff to stand down so that he can improve on their dismal invasion record. He subsequently invades nine countries so that he can import their progressive social practices.

In Italy, Moore interviews a happy couple whose jobs allow them eight weeks' paid annual leave; Italian women have five months' paid maternity leave. On average, Italians outlive Americans by four years. In rural Normandy, Moore talks to schoolchildren enjoying a regular gourmet lunch. Sex education in French schools emphasises safety, not abstinence; teen pregnancies there number less than half those in America. Moore learns that, despite getting minimal homework, Finnish pupils are the world's best educated. Slovenian college education is free for foreigners as well as for natives. Work-stressed Germans are permitted free spa vacations. Whereas

Germany takes responsibility for the Holocaust, America only reluctantly acknowledges slavery and the native genocide. In Portugal, a policeman tells Moore that he could not arrest him for carrying drugs; a doctor explains that the decriminalisation of drugs needs to be accompanied by free healthcare. In Norway, Moore visits a hospitable maximum-security prison where rehabilitation, not punishment, is the goal. A man whose son was murdered during the July 2011 neo-Nazi attacks tells Moore that he doesn't seek revenge. Moore's next stop is Tunisia, where women spearheaded the 2011 revolution to gain equal opportunities and representation. In Iceland, Moore plays golf with three women CEOs who helped to rebuild the national economy following the 2008 collapse; culpable male bankers have been jailed. Moore and a friend examine a remnant of the Berlin Wall; Moore describes its fall, which they'd witnessed, as a metaphor for positive change.



— is neither concerned with real war and invasion nor bellicose in tone.

Despite the sniping title, *Where to Invade Next* finds Moore in beneficent mood. Compared with such urgent agitational works as *Roger & Me* (1989), *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and *Sicko* (2007), it is a peculiarly non-combative work for him to have put out in an election season, yet there is method in his new-found (and no doubt temporary) mildness. Subverting the notions of American imperialism and exceptionalism to go on a fact-finding mission to eight European countries and democratic Tunisia, the Arab world's most progressive state, Moore builds a portfolio of practical humanistic initiatives that — were the next administration to adopt them wholesale — would transform America into the most caring and possibly law-abiding society on the planet, if not a Capra-esque Shangri-La.

More feasibly, the film challenges Americans to insist on basic human rights while considering alternative ways to counter problems as diverse as obesity, worker exploitation, teen pregnancy, accountability for financial crimes, recidivism (80 per cent in America compared with 20 per cent in Norway) and institutionalised racism. Moore interpolates his conversation with Dr Nuno Capaz — who says that Portugal's decriminalisation of drugs in 2001 made drug abuse a public-health issue — with the compelling argument that the severe penalties imposed on the use of 'urban' drugs such as crack cocaine have led to the imprisonment and permanent disenfranchisement of a third of black men in Florida and Virginia, turning these into 'red' states. (In total, 2.2 million black American citizens are banned from voting.)

Where to Invade Next makes a potent case for Moore as a feminist filmmaker. "Throughout my invasions, where women had power, people were simply better off," he says before meeting female Icelandic leaders who have taken this principle to "a higher level". They include Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, the world's first democratically elected woman president; Halla Tómasdóttir, whose Audur Capital, founded on risk-aware 'feminine values', was one of the only Icelandic financial institutions to stay in the black when the country's banks collapsed in 2008; and a steely CEO who disparagingly contrasts American individualism with Icelandic community consciousness. Testosterone was the root cause of Iceland's recession, Moore discovers. The film's Tunisian section also celebrates the collective power of women — specifically the protesters who brought down the dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali during the Arab Spring and fought successfully for equal-rights amendments.

Uttering out his jaw and lower lip, Moore plants the American flag on each of the countries he invades. His rhetoric may be hokey, but his people-first stance is stirring. He has naturally been denounced as a propagandist by the film's non-liberal critics, a number of whom have used the term 'cherry-picking' to describe his focus on the different countries' social advances rather than their chronic problems. They fail to see that Moore is a patriot who wants the best for his fellow Americans. 🇺🇸

X-Men Apocalypse

USA 2016

Director: Bryan Singer

Certificate 12A 143m 47s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In Fox's latest X-Men film, a group of young mutants come out of a screening of *Return of the Jedi* in 1983 hotly debating the relative merits of *Star Wars* sequels; the knowing throwaway punchline is: "We can all agree the third one is always the worst" — a dig at Brett Ratner's *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006), widely seen as a disappointment after Bryan Singer's *X-Men* (2000) and *X2* (2003), especially in its bungling of a major comics storyline ("The Dark Phoenix Saga") as a subplot. When Singer returned in 2014 with *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, itself a sequel to Matthew Vaughn's *X-Men: First Class* (2011), the time-twisting storyline wiped *The Last Stand* out of continuity, incidentally overwriting *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009) to clear the slate for a reboot of Ryan Reynolds's disposable villain Deadpool as a star turn.

By now, the spaghetti tangle of timelines is beyond tidying up. The Storm, Cyclops and Beast who appear here are reconcilable with the versions played by older actors in the original trilogy, but Sophie Turner's Jean Grey is a stretch to fit with Famke Janssen's previous incarnation; and carrying over Jennifer Lawrence's Raven/Mystique, the franchise's female lead since *First Class*, makes her shapeshifting character very different (more prominent and heroic) from Rebecca Romijn's Mystique. Ben Hardy's punk Angel (not to be confused with the *other* Angel, from *First Class*) is a complete reboot of Ben Foster's preppy Angel from *The Last Stand*. Confused? That's before even considering the schism of Evan Peters's Peter and Aaron Taylor-Johnson's Pietro from *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015). Dimensional barriers between timelines are more easily breached than contractual walls between franchises at different studios, though Spider-Man's swinging between Marvel/Disney and Sony proves it's not impossible.

As the sixth (or ninth, depending on how you look at it) entry in the series, *Apocalypse* is overburdened by a need to confirm or disavow previous films — even *elements* of previous films. It is also a 'third one' itself, in a decade-specific run that began with the 1963-set *First Class* and continued in the 1973-set *Days of Future Past*. An Egyptian prologue references not only *Land of the Pharaohs* and *The Mummy* (sadly, the Stephen Sommers version) but also the X-Men franchise's persistent gay subtext, as a homoerotic slave-military rebellion intervenes during a mutant ritual and buries the big baddie En Sabah Nur — aka Apocalypse — for millennia. The story proper takes place in 1983, which offers relatively slim pickings after the earlier films' Cuban missile crisis and Watergate/Vietnam backdrops — though there are nice fashion gags and great use of the Eurythmics' 'Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)' to score a stunning super-speed mass rescue. This reprises a *Days of Future Past* set piece but adds scale and character (last time, Peter had to be cajoled into doing the right thing — now he relishes his heroism in an affecting but interestingly immature manner).

Oscar Isaac's En Sabah Nur is a type of comic-book villain who doesn't register well in films — bad news for studios bigging up Thanos and Darkseid as antagonists. He stands about being monolithically evil, while more interesting characters such as Michael Fassbender's Magneto waver between good and evil and do the heavy lifting. Furthermore, *Apocalypse* is an episodic mess as both teams run around recruiting before the climactic battle. What redeems it is Singer's knack for shorthand character and action beats. Strange as it is that 21st-century cinema needs the specialism, he depicts superhuman abilities with more skill than anyone else, whether it's Jean not letting a sheaf of papers fall to the floor or Magneto disassembling Sydney Opera House. 🇺🇸

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Simon Kinberg
Bryan Singer
Hutch Parker
Lauren Shuler Donner
Screenplay
Simon Kinberg
Story
Bryan Singer
Simon Kinberg
Michael Dougherty
Dan Harris
Director of Photography
Newton Thomas Sigel
Film Editors
John Otman
Michael Louis Hill
Production Designer
Grant Major
Music
John Otman
Sound Recordist
Patrick Rousseau

Costume Designer
Louise Mingenbach
Visual Effects
MPC
Rising Sun Pictures
Cinesite
Raynault
[Hy]drau[x]
Mels Studios
Special Visual Effects and Character Animation by
Digital Domain
Stunt Co-ordinators
Jeff Habberstad
James M. Churchman
Mike Scherer
Trevor Habberstad
Nick Brandon
Paul Leonard
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Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC.
Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox presents in association with Marvel Entertainment and TSG Entertainment a Bad Hat Harry, Kinberg Genre, Hutch Parker, Donners' Company production A Bryan Singer film
Executive Producers
Stan Lee
Todd Hallowell
Josh McLaglen
Film Extracts
Up the Academy (1980)
X-Men First

Class (2011)
X-Men Days of Future Past (2014)
The Hurt Locker (2008)
Cast
James McAvoy
Professor Charles Xavier, 'Professor X'
Michael Fassbender
Erik Lehnsherr, 'Magneto', 'War'
Jennifer Lawrence
Raven Darkholme, 'Mystique'
Oscar Isaac
En Sabah Nur, 'Apocalypse'
Nicholas Hoult
Henry McCoy, 'Hank', 'Beast'
Rose Byrne

Moiria MacTaggart
Evan Peters
Peter Maximoff, 'Quicksilver'
Tye Sheridan
Scott Summers, 'Cyclops'
Sophie Turner
Jean Grey
Olivia Munn
Elizabeth Braddock, 'Psylocke', 'Pestilence'
Kodi Smit-McPhee
Kurt Wagner, 'Nightcrawler'
Alexandra Shipp
Ororo Munroe, 'Storm', 'Famine'
Lucas Till
Alex Summers, 'Havok'
Josh Helman
Colonel William Stryker

Ben Hardy
Warren Worthington III, 'Angel', 'Death'
Lana Condor
Jubilation Lee, 'Jubilee'
Zeljko Ivanek
Pentagon scientist
Anthony Konechny
school jock

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

Ancient Egypt. Immortal tyrant En Sabah Nur is entombed under a collapsed pyramid.

In 1983, En Sabah Nur is freed. Intent on destroying human civilisation, he recruits four mutants — Storm, Angel, Psylocke and Magneto (recently embittered by the deaths of his wife and daughter) — to serve as Horsemen of the Apocalypse. When mutant leader Charles Xavier is captured and his mutants' school

destroyed, Henry McCoy/Beast and Raven/Mystique have to rely on untested recruits Scott Summers/Cyclops, Jean Grey, Peter Maximoff/Quicksilver and Kurt Wagner/Nightcrawler. Magneto unleashes worldwide devastation. In Cairo, the heroes confront the Horsemen. Magneto and Storm are persuaded to turn against En Sabah Nur, who is vanquished. Xavier revives his plan to found a mutant hero group, the X-Men.



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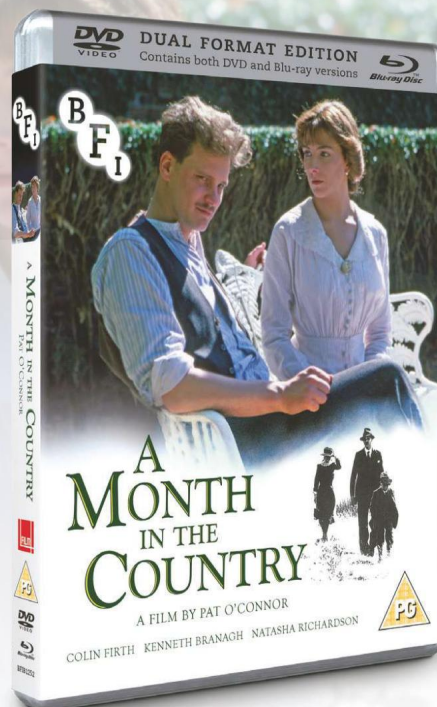
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AND DIRECTOR PAT O'CONNOR



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Home cinema



Take the money and run: Lizabeth Scott and Arthur Kennedy in *Too Late for Tears*

GONE GIRLS

Two desperate housewives break free from dreary marriages and disenchanted lives in this double bill of newly restored *noirs*

TOO LATE FOR TEARS

Byron Haskin; USA 1949; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 99 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: audio commentary by Alan K. Rode, 'Chance of a Lifetime: The Making of Too Late for Tears' featurette, 'Tiger Hunt: Restoring Too Late for Tears', gallery, booklet

WOMAN ON THE RUN

Norman Foster; USA 1950; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 75 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: audio commentary by Eddie Muller, 'Love Is a Rollercoaster: Woman on the Run Revisited' featurette, 'A Wild Ride: Restoring Woman on the Run', 'Noir City' documentary, gallery, booklet

Reviewed by Kim Morgan

Marriage. What does it do to people? Or, more specifically, to women? Oh, it's fulfilling and children are often born and two souls are united, and there's hard times and good times, and then... Who are we kidding? It gets old. Not irrevocably

so, not always (but enough that divorce is as common as the cold), but some people become so rote that they lose their way, they sleepwalk through the motions, dreaming of another life, floating in some marital netherworld they never anticipated. They pace around a kitchen and coolly reveal rows of dog-food cans in the cupboard to inspectors while their husband's gone missing. They go sociopathic with glee when a bag of money falls in their lap, never mind that their husband wants to do the right thing, because, why would you do that? Why not team up with Dan Duryea, double-cross his sleazy ass and run off with a bag of loot? Is that normal? Should it be? What is normal?

When discussing the dual release of *Too Late for Tears* (1949) and *Woman on the Run* (1950), two pictures long buried in scratchy public-domain copies and now restored thanks to UCLA Film & Television Archive and the Film Noir Foundation, nothing is normal. And yet nothing is unrecognisable either. Humans are human. And odd. In *Too Late for Tears*, the weirdest housewife in the world, Lizabeth Scott, says to a snooping, face-slapping Duryea, "I let you in because, well, housewives can get awfully bored sometimes..." In *Woman on the*

Run, the most disenchanted housewife in the world, Ann Sheridan, is asked to describe her missing husband to suspicious detectives. Her answer: "I haven't been able to for a long time."

Byron Haskin's *Too Late for Tears* is the meaner of the two pictures. Scott is just riding along at night with her husband (Arthur Kennedy) when a bag of money tossed from a passing car lands on their back seat. Well, how's that for lucky (unlucky) accidents? Kennedy wants to take it to the police, Scott wants to keep it, and they make it past the real recipients *and* the police and all the way home, emptying out the money on the bed, Scott practically orgasmic with the idea of \$1000 almost literally falling in her lap. Kennedy asks, perplexed, "What is it, Jane? I just don't understand you." Yes. It is safe to say that this man doesn't understand his wife. Has he ever understood her?

And then Duryea shows up... Duryea takes in lovely Scott and sees right away what her husband has been cluelessly unaware of – this lady is crooked, perhaps evil, and Duryea likes it. It gets him off. Scott is perfectly suited for this type of attraction – she often appears a somnambulist with an odd kind of toughness – an angelic face and that valium-tinted voice,

trained but tranquil, and so her evil comes off not hard and not vulnerable but... lost. She's sexual and asexual. She's completely in control and completely insane. She's confusing, her mystery impenetrable. And that's attractive.

This attraction isn't Duryea's smartest move, however, as Scott's bored housewife is so mercenary that nothing, not her husband, not even Duryea, is going to get in her way. She moves to places that even an eventually sympathetic and nuanced Duryea finds terrifying, which is really saying something.

The movie becomes deliciously hysterical with Scott's single-minded yen for money, swirling into a dreamscape that feels almost allegorical of a housewife's desperate attempt to break the monotony of her life. The picture is most stylish by its climax – one that recalls Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956), where another damn suitcase is the downfall. In that film, Sterling Hayden purchases a cheap one, then watches his money fly all over the tarmac; Scott trips over her suitcase and tumbles off a terrace. The result of all her dirty deeds is a beautiful shot – Scott, gorgeous in her evening gown, lying on the ground like some dead angel, money gently falling all around her like snow.

Norman Foster's *Woman on the Run* is the more baroquely beautiful and stylish of the two films, the director's mentoring and work with Orson Welles (he collaborated with Welles on *It's All True* and directed him in *Journey into Fear*) felt throughout (with help by DP Hal Mohr). And marriage is the focal point. (The script is by Alan Campbell, who had recently divorced Dorothy Parker; the two got back together after this picture was made, another curiosity.)

Why not team up with Dan Duryea, double-cross his sleazy ass and run off with a bag of loot?

It's an intriguing set-up: a man (Ross Elliott) who witnesses a murder goes missing, and his depressed, sick-of-it-all wife (Sheridan) winds up being the woman sent to find him. When you first meet her she seems barely to care that he's gone. He's always gone, it seems, and their marriage is so damaged that she has hardened into grim acceptance. But when she learns that he needs life-saving heart medicine, she teams up with a reporter (Dennis O'Keefe) and scours San Francisco (the film utilises striking and nicely lived-in locations in the city) to find him.

In the process, the picture upends our expectations of the cynical wife in this *noir* landscape – she starts learning how much her husband actually loves her. And she begins feeling things again. Sheridan (who was promoted as the 'Oomph Girl!' – a moniker she detested) gives one of her greatest – perhaps her very greatest – performance here: tough but vulnerable, world-weary but able to light up when she really starts to see that her marriage has been muddled by a dreary fog. It's powerful and disarmingly moving that the picture's finale occurs on what's often representational of love: a rollercoaster, and Sheridan is so moved to see her husband that she screams his name with fear and love.

Both pictures feature fascinating, unforgettable women. Blonde, pretty Scott is dead inside, marriage means nothing. Hard-boiled Sheridan needs to find her life and resuscitate her marriage. One hides a cold, murderous heart, psychopathic and greedy; the other hides warmth and love, a heart tamped down by disappointment and marital atrophy. Both have serious issues with their husbands. Both want out of their humdrum lives. In both pictures, marriage is viewed as a dreamy, demented landscape, and though each woman winds up being quite different from the other, the universal disappointment of married life is similar. A key moment in *Woman on the Run* sums up both pictures. When an inspector (Robert Keith) questions Sheridan's husband, he asks him if he's married. His answer: "In a way." 📺

New releases

THE DESERT OF THE TARTARS

Valerio Zurlini; Italy/France 1976; Pathé/Multi-Region Blu-ray and DVD; 140 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'The Desert of the Tartars: from Adaptation to Restoration' documentary

Reviewed by David Thompson

Valerio Zurlini, whose career spanned two decades from the 1950s, is hardly a noted auteur outside Italy and France. His two most celebrated early films, *Violent Summer* (1959) and *Girl with the Suitcase* (1961), have been elusive (the US label NoShame released them together, with English subtitles, but that DVD is now out of print and fetching very high prices). Zurlini's last, *The Desert of the Tartars*, doesn't appear to have been screened theatrically in the UK at all. But with recent restorations, all three films have now begun to surface on the festival/repertory circuit, and *The Desert of the Tartars* – of which the French version under review and its Italian counterpart could both be described as 'original' – can at last be appreciated as a masterful work, if not a full-blown masterpiece.

The film is a close adaptation of a novel (usually translated as *The Tartar Steppe*) by Dino Buzzati, who like Zurlini has been acclaimed on the continent but remains largely unknown in Britain. When evoking the style of the book, most commentators have drawn comparisons with Kafka and Camus, and Zurlini's film for sure depicts an existentialist world haunted by death. An ambitious young European officer (played by actor/producer Jacques Perrin) believes he will achieve military glory when posted to a border fortress of an unnamed empire, only to discover once there that the enemy forces are invisible and no one can be certain they will ever attack. An epic without action scenes, its subject becomes the strained relationships between the ranks, their obsessions with regulations and protocol, and the impossibility of escape.

Zurlini's triumph is to marshal a classy Euro-putting cast – Vittorio Gassman, Fernando Rey, Helmut Griem, Max von Sydow and Jean-Louis Trintignant, to name but a few – into a consistent style of acting, and with stunning cinematography by Luciano Tovoli (the great collaborator of Antonioni and Argento) create a coherent universe for them to inhabit. Shooting at the hallucinatory location of Bam in Iran, a pre-Christian city topped by a vast adobe citadel (tragically, it was reduced to rubble in an earthquake in 2003), Zurlini was able – in a pre-CGI era – to render an absolute reality into something intensely magical.

The penultimate image, in which the mysterious enemy finally emerges in the distance out of the dust, can be confidently recorded as one of the greatest in the history of cinema.

Disc: This French version of the film has been lovingly restored and the sound subtly remixed. Excellent English subtitles are provided on the feature but not on the documentary. 📺



Husbands and wives: Dennis O'Keefe, Ann Sheridan and Victor Sen Yung in *Woman on the Run*

New releases



EASY RIDER

Dennis Hopper; USA 1969; Criterion/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 92 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: documentaries, commentaries from Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda and production manager Paul Lewis, BBS partner Steve Blauner interview, French TV Cannes clip, trailers, booklet notes by Matt Zoller Seitz

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Here's a textbook example of a film that has been so influential it barely matters that it stands up as well as it does.

This new 4k transfer supervised by original cameraman László Kovács certainly shows *Easy Rider* at its very best, and the sheer vividness of the skies, landscapes and skin tones will be a revelation to anyone who last saw it in a battered print on the late-night circuit. The result is akin to a public monument given a good scrub so that we can appreciate it for the first time, and if the film's connecting narrative thread about a cross-country drug deal is as slender as ever, the way the name cast and non-professional locals play off each other in semi-improv fashion, powered along by a groundbreaking soundtrack of FM favourites, certainly stands in energised opposition to traditional Hollywood assembly methods. That invigorating independent attitude still comes across strongly, allied to a surprising mindfulness about the challenge of realising true freedom in a country that supposedly celebrates it – ultimately allowing us to forgive the sometimes toe-curling faux-gnostic dialogue and dated acid-trip visuals elsewhere.

Disc: A packed array of extras illustrates why Criterion editions have been so revered on the other side of the Atlantic, making this first batch of UK releases an event for Region B collectors. The BBC doc *Born to Be Wild* and a marvellously informative tripartite commentary with Hopper, Fonda and production manager Paul Lewis illustrate how artistic conviction and fortuitous circumstance played their part in the making of a modern milestone.

FORBIDDEN HOLLYWOOD VOLUME 10

GUILTY HANDS/THE MOUTHPIECE/SECRETS OF THE FRENCH POLICE/THE MATCH KING/EVER IN MY HEART

W.S. Van Dyke/James Flood and Elliott Nugent/Edward Sutherland/Howard Bretherton and William Keighley/ Archie Mayo; USA 1931/32/32/32/33; Warner Archive/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 69/86/57/78/68 minutes; 4:3/1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

One cannot yet be cynical about the retroactively defined genre of 'pre-Code' – these creaky early talkies are at the same time too adorably *outré* and too stunningly frank to dismiss. They can have the tarnished glow of *fin de siècle* nudie postcards; often it's as if we're seeing Hollywood as an unbridled teenager with a hard-on, a full liquor cabinet and no church ladies in sight. As we all well know, those years only last so long. Still, the annals are not inexhaustible in terms of their 'our-grandfolks-were-watching-what?' raciness, and so the five archival showcases in this tenth volume of Warner's series are less shocking in their details than fascinating as generalised time-capsules and, on occasion, ingenious slices of old-fashioned narrative cunning.

Not quite salacious, Edward Sutherland's *Secrets of the French Police* is in fact grand early-talkie skylarking, a rather Langian procedural chin-deep in hypnosis, cat burglars, Russian royalty refugees and underground secrets, hovering around Frank Morgan's unperplexed dandy detective, Gregory Ratoff's White Russian Svengali (scheming to unveil the true Anastasia) and the remarkable porcelain princess Gwili Andre, a Danish would-be Garbo who only made six other films, all forgotten B pictures.

W.S. Van Dyke's *Guilty Hands*, however, is bizarrely juicy, tracking doting father Lionel Barrymore's determination to murder womanising zillionaire Alan Mowbray before the man can sully his daughter, Madge Evans – with whom Barrymore has a zingy single-entendre flirtation that sends your eyebrows to the ceiling. ("Father, whatta lover you'd have made," she pipes.) Kay Francis, as the playboy's faithful plaything, mopes around, until eventually of course the prophesied murder sets everyone at odds.

There are two Warren William movies: *The Match King* is a semi-faithful biopic of industrialist/banking manipulator Ivar Kreuger (including a romance with a version of Greta Garbo, played by Lili Damita). But *The Mouthpiece* is craftier, a slam at legal chicanery in which William, after quitting his job as a DA after getting an innocent man fried, becomes a big-time defence lawyer who can wheedle anything – including his new 'jailbait' typist (Sidney Fox). It's full of startling details, from the close-up of hands ripping the condemned man's trouser leg (for the electric clamp) to the final assassination, where the gunshot is masked by car noise.

The youngest in the set, Archie Mayo's *Ever in My Heart*, is a headlong social-injustice romance that begins in 1909, in which Barbara Stanwyck loves German émigré Otto Kruger until World War I Germanophobia destroys their lives and sends him to war on the Kaiser's side – which is where she goes to find him, with virtually Brontëan results. This was the way movie stories could sometimes be – emotionally precise and earnestly tragic.

Disc: Fine transfers of occasionally fuzzy archive prints.



Sauce pre-Code: *The Mouthpiece*

IN A LONELY PLACE

Nicholas Ray; USA 1950; Criterion/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 93 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: essay, commentary, documentaries, trailer, radio play

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

The hero of *In a Lonely Place* is a Hollywood screenwriter constantly hailed as a genius, although his last hit happened an uncomfortably long time ago, before the war. He is Dix Steele, and he is played by Humphrey Bogart with equal parts menace and mystery. Dix may be capable of great writing and, enticingly, he may be able to fall in love with his sultry, damaged neighbour (a terrific Gloria Grahame), but he also has a capacity for sudden violence. The most pressing question of all is whether he is capable of murder – the strangling of a young girl. In the end, the question becomes not whether he did, but whether he *could*. In this lonely place, all the characters, like the Hollywood setting, are defined by their flaws and the traumas of the past that created them.

Nicholas Ray's tragic *film noir* is also breathtakingly romantic, with the fragile, sexy relationship between his two leads a shadow of his own collapsing marriage to Grahame. And it seems fitting that the hero is a screenwriter, because from that poison dart of a title to the self-consciously classic "I was born when she kissed me..." line, *In a Lonely Place* appears to be the product of a genius writer like Dix. In fact, the screenplay was a collaborative effort, and as was Ray's practice, each scene was developed via improvisation.

However it was crafted, it remains one of the very best, and most beautiful, *noirs* – a woozy film that is ultimately as unsettling as its irresistible but dangerous hero.

Disc: Criterion's UK release features a luscious transfer and generous extras. The booklet essay by Imogen Sara Smith and the commentary by Dana Polan offer rich insights into this wonderful film. The most intriguing supplement is a trimmed version of the 1975 Ray documentary *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*, which interviews the director on set with his film students and has contributions from notables including François Truffaut. A more recent documentary features Curtis Hanson's thoughts on the film, and there is a fascinating interview



Match point: *In a Lonely Place*

OFFICER MATERIAL

From grapevine to screen: how Josef von Sternberg turned Hollywood hearsay into an epoch-hopping masterpiece

THE LAST COMMAND

Josef von Sternberg: USA 1928; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 88 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.33:1; Features: original organ score by Gaylord Carter, new video interview with Tony Rayns, 'Sternberg Till '29' video essay by Tag Gallagher, booklet

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Improbable as it may seem, *The Last Command* (1928), Josef von Sternberg's hymn to the end of empires, was based on a true story. The path this tale took to reach the screen is also as perfect an illustration of the warped, gossipy machinations of Hollywood as you could find. Director Ernst Lubitsch once met a former Russian general in New York, who was running a restaurant. After encountering the same man in Hollywood, reduced to working as an extra for \$7.50 a day, he told the man's story to actor Emil Jannings, suggesting that he might like to play such a character. The twist was that in California, the Russian was being paid scraps to play the role he once inhabited in real life – that of a general in the imperial army. Jannings then told the story to screenwriter Lajos Bíró, who began work on a script and repeated the anecdote back to Lubitsch, crediting Jannings with the discovery. Von Sternberg filmed Bíró's screenplay as *The Last Command*, and Lubitsch's general was duly given a bit part.

There's more. After the film was released, when Paramount was sued for plagiarism by a third party, Bíró pointed at Jannings, who pointed at Lubitsch – who, having been denied the credit earlier, refused to take it just to save the studio from making a settlement. Years later von Sternberg, in his immodest memoir *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*, cut out the middlemen by claiming sole credit for the screenplay, dismissing Bíró and claiming that Lubitsch saw no potential in his own "meagre but very good idea". One can only hope that the general spent his \$7.50 wisely.

Authorial quibbles aside, *The Last Command*, which is set both in contemporary Hollywood ("The Magic Empire of the Twentieth Century!") and pre-revolutionary Russia ("Proud, majestic, haughty – seemingly eternal as the ages!"), is a masterpiece. In the Hollywood scenes, Sergius Alexander, a humbled, quivering wreck played by Jannings, is hired by dictatorial director Leo Andreyev (a debonair William Powell) for a small but crucial scene in a war film. Chided by a fellow extra for his constant trembling, Alexander replies that he can't help it: "I had a great shock once."

The Hollywood sequences bookend the main substance of the film – the pair's previous encounter in Russia in 1917, with Jannings as the puffed-up general arresting Powell the tattered revolutionary and marching off with



Extra, extra: Emil Jannings in *The Last Command*

his sweetheart. The dramatic tension doubles, as the film promises us both Andreyev's revenge at the studio and the revelation of Alexander's "great shock" in Russia.

It is a woman who breaks Alexander's heart, naturally, in an icy trauma that follows some intricate plotting and lashings of brutality and mortification. That woman is Evelyn Brent's glamorous revolutionary, who holds Alexander's fate as well as his heart in her grasp. One of the film's many pleasures is Brent's swift and shocking transformation from enigmatic beauty to riotous woman of passion, wielding a revolutionary flag while wearing pearls.

It is Jannings's performance that carries the film, though – recalling his work in *The Last Laugh* (*Der letzte Mann*, 1924), another tale of a proud man in uniform brought low. For this, and for the lost film *The Way of All Flesh*, he won the first Academy Award for best actor. Jannings finds the humanity inside the tsarist military leader, and the fight inside the spirit-broken extra, with both incarnations fired by Alexander's undimmed patriotism.

Even so, von Sternberg's superlative direction most distinguishes this film. Precociously,

The twist was that in California, the Russian was being paid scraps to play the role he once inhabited in real life

he frames complex shots that other directors would linger over, and dashes them away in favour of a quick dissolve into a tighter set-up, a new angle. The blizzard of compositions in the film's transition to the Russian snow is bewilderingly impressive. It also seems like an in-joke on the film's theme of perfect artificiality beating truth – if von Sternberg can make a small set dredged in fake snow appear like Russia, then Alexander's final on-set hallucination is inevitable. After all, the jostling extras picking up their uniforms and guns look just like new recruits – or Alexander's own army. In one of the film's best jokes (courtesy of title-writer Herman J. Mankiewicz), when Alexander presumes to place his own medals on his costume-uniform, a jumped-up assistant director tells him: "I've made 20 Russian pictures. You can't tell me anything about Russia!" And in Russia, while there is a real war to be fought, Alexander must recall his troops to parade in front of the tsar, a spectacle as hollow as Andreyev's studio trench.

Masters of Cinema's dual-format release marks the very welcome arrival of this stunning film to this region. The supplements comprise a booklet of archival material and two video extras: an interview with Tony Rayns on the film, and a short essay by Tag Gallagher on von Sternberg's silent career. It's just a shame that the only audio option is Gaylord Carter's organ music, which will please a certain shade of purist but isn't as engaging as the alternative scores offered on the recent Criterion release. **S**

Revival

AUTEUR IN THE MAKING

A trio of early features shows Hou Hsiao-Hsien forging a path to maturity and asserting his own directorial style

HOU HSIAO-HSIEN EARLY WORKS

**CUTE GIRL/GREEN, GREEN GRASS OF HOME/
THE BOYS FROM FENGKUEI**

Taiwan 1980-83; Cinematek/Region 0 DVD; 86/87/95 minutes; 2.35:1/1.85:1; Features: video essays on each film by Cristina Alvarez López and Adrian Martin, brochure with essay by Tom Paulus (2016)

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

The Royal Film Archive of Belgium's welcome region-free DVD set, available through Amazon, offers restored versions of three early films by Hou Hsiao-Hsien, all with English, Dutch and French subtitle options. It contains Hou's first, third and fourth features, but not his second (*Cheerful Wind/Feng'er Tita Cai*, originally known in English as *Play While You Play*, 1981) or his episode 'Son's Big Doll' ('Erzi de Da Wan'ou') from the portmanteau movie *The Sandwich Man* (also titled *Erzi de Da Wan'ou*, 1983). Controversially, the main title cards of the first and fourth features have been changed to replace the original English titles (*Lovable You* and *All the Youthful Days*) with *Cute Girl* and *The Boys from Fengkuei* respectively – without acknowledging that the new English titles were invented by Shu Kei in Hong Kong (who hadn't seen either *Lovable You* or *Play While You Play*) when he distributed *The Boys from Fengkuei* in the then-colony.

It would be ridiculous to claim too much for *Cute Girl* (1980; the Chinese title *Jiushi Liuliu de Ta* translates better as 'She's So Cute') or *Green, Green Grass of Home* (*Zai na Hepan Qing Cao Qing*, 1982). Both are vehicles for the Hong Kong pop star Kenny B (sometimes 'Bee'), a refugee from boy-band The Wynners who parlayed his independence into a fairly short-lived acting career. *Cute Girl* is a conservative, conventionally plotted romcom: an upper-middle-class girl (Taiwan pop star Feng Feifei) who doesn't mind getting dirty in the countryside runs away from an arranged marriage but is allowed to marry her true love only when it emerges that he's also solidly middle-class. Hou was then working regularly with director/cinematographer Chen Kunhou, eight years older than Hou and a professional DP in the industry since 1971, and the film's orthodoxies follow directly from the four movies they'd already made together with Chen as director and Hou as his assistant and screenwriter.

The other two films in the set were also shot by Chen, but they show Hou progressively asserting his own directorial ideas by refusing to follow Taiwan's industry conventions. *Green, Green Grass of Home* is less frivolous, less sappy and much more nuanced than *Cute Girl*. Kenny B plays a Taipei teacher replacing his sister at a rural school, where he gets involved with eco-projects



Going up the country: *Cute Girl*

and falls for a local girl. There are still scatological gags and romantic clichés, but there are also some eye-grabbing extended takes that were clearly not mandated by the need to conserve film stock, not to mention some scenes with non-pro child actors in which spontaneity is king.

And that's the point here: we look at Hou's early work to find pre-echoes of the later films, to understand better how he became a 'great' of modern cinema. But the auteurist approach needs other perspectives too: an awareness of the constraints on filmmaking under Taiwan's martial law in the early 1980s (censorship, material limitations), of the island's changing sense of itself (especially in relation to China) and of developments in Taiwan's other arts (notably literature). Not much of those frames of reference is available on this set; you'd do better to read James Udden's

Here's a director finding his feet as an independent-minded chronicler of Taiwan's particular history



Making a splash: *The Boys from Fengkuei*

flawed but always interesting *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-Hsien* (2009).

The real turning-point in Hou's career was *The Boys from Fengkuei* (1983), which flopped in Taiwan but won him his first festival prize. Hou formed a company with 'bad-boy' producer Zhang Huakun to make it, and their partnership endured – despite at least two bankruptcies – until *The Puppetmaster* ten years later. The script was Hou's first collaboration with the novelist Zhu Tianwen, she being the one who had recommended him to read mainland writer Shen Congwen for lessons in aesthetic perspective. Three young men from Fengkuei in the Penghu Islands move to Kaohsiung, Taiwan's southern port city, in search of brighter futures. They make every mistake country hicks can make, but their brushes with factory work, conmen, crime and women provide a steep learning curve. Flashbacks to childhood in Fengkuei make the structure engagingly complicated, but it's Hou's new preference for long, fixed-angle shots, ideally framing the characters in the middle-distance, that makes the social-realist approach magical. Here's a director turning away from old industry practices, mediating his own path to maturity through fiction (he gives himself a cameo as a mahjong-playing roughneck) and finding his feet as an independent-minded chronicler of Taiwan's particular history.

The Cinematek discs offer state-of-the-art restorations (from the original negative in the case of *The Boys from Fengkuei*). Image quality is a marked improvement on 35mm prints seen back in the day; English subtitles are also improved, though far from expert in matters of transliteration and formatting. The video-essays by Cristina Alvarez López and Adrian Martin (15-22 minutes) are pedestrian-going-on-platitudinous; they take a resolutely blinkered auteurist approach and mangle all Chinese names except Hou's. ☹

New releases

with Grahame's biographer Vincent Curcio. There's also a vintage trailer and a 1948 radio adaptation of the source novel.

KANSAS CITY CONFIDENTIAL

Phil Karlson; USA 1952; The Film Detective/

All-Region Blu-ray; 99 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Unarguably in the upper-percentile echelon of *noirs*, this heist-fallout picture has had an outsized influence on American cinema – scores of movies owe their essential DNA to it, but the fingerprints on *The Anderson Tapes* (1971) and *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), narrative and physical, are particularly unmistakable.

Arduous for *noir* can sometimes be asked to overlook clunky plotting or hasty staging, but no concessions need be made for Phil Karlson's badass character-fest, in which the rather Lawrence Tierney-ish Preston Foster arranges a bank robbery with desperate losers Jack Elam, Lee Van Cleef and Neville Brand (who never meet without masks), carefully framing a delivery man (John Payne) in the process. After being tortured by the police, Payne's hellaciously bitter stooge goes after the mysterious fugitives himself, pursuing them to an all-studio Mexican tourist trap where he co-opts one of their IDs (who's to know?) and also inopportunely falls for Foster's law-school daughter Colleen Gray, without anyone knowing who anyone is.

The *noir* soil is rich with subtext, from the haunting memory of WWII (all the men are scarred vets disgusted with the world they fought for) to ideas about lost identity and squandered purpose inherent in the crime plot itself. But it's the surface perfection that's stunning – this is a *noir* directed and written by four scribes (plus Karlson and Payne without credit) who knew for real about risk, anger, gambling, poverty and a pitiless post-war America.

Disc: For years lost in public domain and available only in cruddy prints, the film has been digitally restored by The Film Detective, an indie outfit sourced from a sole collector's library of prints. It's a great job, startlingly clear but faithful to 50s grain and *noir*-ish darkness.

THE KENNEDY FILMS OF ROBERT DREW & ASSOCIATES

PRIMARY/ADVENTURES ON THE NEW FRONTIER/CRISIS/FACES OF NOVEMBER

Robert Drew, Richard Leacock, Terence Macartney-Filgate, Albert Maysles, D.A. Pennebaker, Kenneth Snelson, James Lipscomb, Hope Ryden; USA 1960/61/63/64; Criterion Collection/Region A Blu-ray; 53/52/53/12 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: alternative 26-minute television cut of 'Primary'; audio commentary on 'Primary'; documentary 'Robert Drew in His Own Words'; new conversation between D.A. Pennebaker and Jill Drew, general manager of Drew Associates; conversation about 'Crisis' featuring former US attorney general Eric Holder; outtakes from 'Crisis' with discussion by historian Andrew Cohen; interview with Kennedy biographer Richard Reeves; booklet essay by Thomas Powers

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The phrase "the best and the brightest", referring to the advisory staff of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was coined by the journalist David Halberstam, writing about the policy blunders that led the US into the Vietnam War. Today



Fatal attraction: *A Kiss Before Dying*

the association of the phrase is mostly tongue-in-cheek, but "the best and the brightest" could honestly be applied to the crew that Robert Drew assembled under the aegis of Drew Associates to make a short documentary about Kennedy and Minnesota senator Hubert Humphrey as they faced off in the 1960 Wisconsin primary, creating an unprecedented document of the political process that has most recently acted as handmaiden to the rise of Trumpism.

Canadian Terence Macartney-Filgate had already been on the ground at the genesis of Québec Cinéma-Direct, while Richard Leacock, Albert Maysles and D.A. Pennebaker would be the most prominent practitioners of the American strain of *cinéma vérité*, reinventing the documentary form with new lightweight, handheld gear that they and Drew had literally invented with the help of a significant investment from *Time Life*. The shoulder-mounted 16mm Auricon camera and synch-sound Perfectone audio recorder allowed Drew Associates to literally walk along with power, and the behind-the-back following shot recurs throughout Criterion's full-to-bursting Blu-ray release, which brings together *Primary* with three other Drew Associates documentaries about the Kennedy administration.

Adventures on the New Frontier, made for television broadcast and burdened with the didactic narration that Drew despised and that *Primary* had largely eschewed, is structured as a day-in-the-life of the presidency, moving from the Oval Office to flashbacks to the Wisconsin primary and inaugural ball and address. It includes a cameo by John Steinbeck, as well as trips to impoverished Pigeon Creek, West Virginia, and to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where Michigan governor G. Mennen Williams, in his capacity as assistant secretary of state for African affairs, pays a visit to Haile Selassie and causes a minor stir by expressing support for "Africa for the Africans".

Crisis centres on the doomed trio of the president, attorney general Bobby Kennedy and Alabama governor George Wallace, who as the film begins has threatened to physically bar two African-American students from registering at the University of Alabama, racially integrated by federal mandate. (It is a testament to the decline of contemporary American political life that even Wallace comes off as relatively civilised.) When *Crisis* aired on ABC in late October 1963, Kennedy had barely a month to live; the final presidential portrait by Drew Associates, the 12-minute *Faces*

of *November*, could only stand by at his funeral, a bleak conclusion to these first-hand accounts of the Thousand Days (and then some), which give visceral form to pensive acts of statesmanship.

Disc: Excellent black-and-white contrast and, as befits the original materials, plenty of chunky, gravel-pit grain.

A KISS BEFORE DYING

Gerd Oswald; USA 1956; Kino Lorber/Region 1/A DVD/

Blu-ray; 94 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: theatrical trailer

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Robert Wagner's tall, trim, impeccably pompadoured all-American college undergraduate Bud Corliss, the nearest thing that *A Kiss Before Dying* has to a protagonist, is as calculating and black-hearted a psychopath as anyone dared to put on screen in the dying days of *film noir*. Having lost a few years to Korea, working-class Bud is itching to make up for lost time and leapfrog ahead in the world by romancing schoolmate Dorothy (Joanna Woodward), a wealthy copper-ore magnate's daughter who tools around in daddy's copper-coloured Thunderbird convertible. (The film was shot in Arizona, mostly around Tucson and the mining country, not long after another classic Sun Belt *noir*, Richard Fleischer's *Violent Saturday*, had been through the state.)

Right from the start there is something 'off' about Bud's smooth, unctuous expressions of concern when Dorothy announces her accidental pregnancy, and you may find yourself squirming through the long, understated sequence shots in which Berlin-born director Gerd Oswald and DP Lucien Ballard repeatedly frame (or trap) the young lovers, including a scene on the athletics-field bleachers that might be out of Antonioni. Bud likewise is looking to bust out, doing away with Dorothy, setting up the result as a suicide, then moving on with alacrity to her sister (Virginia Leith).

The film's bifurcated narrative and troubling play with viewer identification look ahead to *Psycho* (1960), while Bud might be a close relation of the faultlessly mannerly Lou Ford in Jim Thompson's 1952 novel *The Killer Inside Me*. The source material here is the first book by Ira Levin (he would later have a hit with another book about a woman in the care of mostly male authority figures who hardly have her best interests at heart: his 1967 *Rosemary's Baby*). A crucial film, and one sick puppy.

Disc: The DeLuxe colour, CinemaScope image has been given a more than acceptable facelift, the sound mix shows its age, and the film itself remains bracingly modern.

MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

Dziga Vertov; USSR 1929; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format;

Certificate E; 69 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: commentary by Adrian Martin, interview with Ian Christie, visual essay by David Cairns, four other Vertov films ('Kino-Eye', 1924, 'Kino-Pravda #21', 1925, 'Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass', 1931, 'Three Songs About Lenin', 1934), booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Less a documentary than a visual poem, Dziga Vertov's acclaimed film offers a dazzling display of montage and virtuoso

Television

CULLODEN/THE WAR GAME

Peter Watkins/UK 1964 + 1965; BBC/BFI/Region 2 DVD/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 69 mins + 46 mins/1.33:1. Extras: John Cook audio commentary on 'Culloden'; Patrick Murphy audio commentary on 'The War Game'; Michael Bradsell Interview; Culloden on Location (Donald Fairservice, 1964, 8 mins); colour footage of filming; feature: 'The War Game: The Controversy'; 'The War Game book' gallery of 1967 illustrated book; booklet with essays & full film credits.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

The BBC's history is littered with figures, from Ken Russell to Ken Loach to Kenny Everett, who found the Corporation at first a liberating, nurturing space where they could exercise their imaginations, and later a smothering, pusillanimous bureaucracy. This was true even for people not called Ken. In Peter Watkins's case, the shift happened more quickly than in most – two films, less than two hours of screen time, and he was out of the door; but they were two of the most original, virtuosic and emotionally wrenching television programmes ever made.

Culloden was the 28-year-old Watkins's first professional film, an account of the rout of Bonnie Prince Charlie's small army of Highland clans and professional Irish troops at Culloden Moor near Inverness, which ended the 1745 rebellion – the last battle fought on British soil. It was presented in the form of a news broadcast – a voiceover naming individual participants and describing their mostly miserable circumstances ("Owns a half-share in a potato patch measuring 30 feet"), actors speaking straight to camera. The conceit could have been tiresome, but the unwavering directness and seriousness are weirdly affecting.

The film was shot in the summer of 1964 at locations around Culloden, with a small budget and a small amateur cast, some recruited from the area, some (including Don Fairservice, whose home movie of the shoot is a pleasing extra on this disc) from a theatre club in Crouch End. In interview here, Watkins's editor Michael Bradsell explains their methods: the impression of a column of soldiers was created by having the same few actors march in front of the camera then dodge round the back to do it again; crowds were suggested by close-ups of huddled actors; and different camera angles and lots of swift cuts masked the fact that the production had only one working cannon. (Bradsell also worked for many years with Ken Russell: I do hope he is writing his memoirs.) Despite these limitations, *Culloden* remains, particularly in this spruced up version, a remarkably vivid portrayal of the confusion and brutality of combat in the age of grapeshot, sword and bayonet. The black-and-white cinematography probably helps smooth some of the rough edges, while adding to the sense of newsreel immediacy. Several moments in the battle scenes – ranks of troops holding the line against a charging enemy, the thrust of bayonet and the writhing of the dying – recall Cy Endfield's ambivalent imperial epic *Zulu*, released earlier the same year: interesting that Watkins's main source was the 1962 book *Culloden* by John Prebble, credited as co-writer on *Zulu*. The violence is underlined by Watkins's palpable rage at the incompetence and callousness of the ruling classes on both sides – the Scots leading untrained, half-starved, poverty-stricken cowherds and



The War Game Scenes in which rioters are lined up to be executed by firing squad are weirdly reminiscent of World War II resistance films

potato farmers against an immeasurably better equipped and more numerous enemy, the English reacting with a vindictive savagery hard to reconcile with English notions of fair play and decency: Watkins's commentary notes sardonically that the commander of the crown's forces, William, Duke of Cumberland, gave his name in England to a flower, sweet william, and in Scotland to a weed, stinking billy. (How irksome to find that this folk etymology is untrue.)

The reception was (and has remained) largely rapturous, though Watkins was frustrated that few noticed the allusion he intended to the Vietnam War. The reception the following year of *The War Game*, his imagining of the consequences of a nuclear attack on Britain, was less satisfactory: having allowed the film to be made the BBC got cold feet and arranged a screening for government representatives. They were predictably outraged by Watkins's vision of a nation falling to pieces faced with starvation and radiation sickness,



Culloden

and the implied mockery of the government's civil defence advice. Unsurprisingly – to perhaps everyone but Watkins – the film was banned: according to Bradsell, the sequence of events that "almost literally destroyed Peter". He left Britain in the late 60s and has lived in exile since, devoting his time to critical analysis of what he calls the MAVM (mainstream audiovisual media) as much as to making films.

Still, the film won the best documentary Oscar in 1967, and enjoyed a healthy life at film clubs and elsewhere. I can still feel, 35 years on, the cold sweat I broke out in on watching a screening arranged by my school's CND branch. It was finally shown by the BBC in 1985, as a prelude to Mick Jackson and Barry Hines's even grimmer nuclear prophecy *Threads*.

Stylistically, *The War Game* resembled *Culloden* closely: again in black and white, again using amateur actors and fake news-style interviews; and both films are, perhaps, guilty of lacking nuance in their depiction of the indifference of the rulers, the numbness of the ruled. This time, allusions to other wars were all too plain: it was not simply that Watkins used data from the World War II bombing raids on Hamburg and Tokyo to show how society would struggle to cope with mass slaughter; it was that, consciously or not, he inverted the familiar tropes of patriotic war films. The firestorms following the nuclear blast echoed images of the Blitz, but with cameraderie and confidence in eventual victory subtracted. Scenes in which rioters were lined up to be executed by firing squad were weirdly reminiscent of WWII resistance films, but with the British government replacing the Nazis. And the Dunkirk spirit, muddling through, all pulling together to defeat the enemy: these were reduced to shreds of myth, hollow and irrelevant in the face of our new ability to destroy ourselves. ☹

New releases

camera trickery, a celebration of the cameraman as hero, the recorder and interpreter of everyday life. The lead character (played by Vertov's brother, cinematographer Mikhail Kaufman) spins and spirals his way through a composite cityscape – Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa – like a Soviet Buster Keaton. He puts up his tripod in the face of oncoming traffic, clambers over bridges, shoots trains, trams and cars. We see people at work and at leisure, strolling, shopping or sleeping; factories humming with life, machines whirring and spinning; birth, marriage, divorce and death.

Vertov, high on the sheer joy of moviemaking, proudly flaunts every cinematic device in his repertoire (speeded-up, slowed-down and reversed motion, split screens, prismatic lenses, freeze frames, superimpositions, stop-action) and delights in visual puns: a piano is twinned with a typewriter keyboard, a divorcing couple with trams heading in opposite directions. In the final reel, the pace quickens until it seems that the whole Soviet Union is rushing towards what could then still be seen as a bright future. **Disc:** Eureka has graced this handsome 2K restoration (from the EYE Film Institute in Amsterdam and Lobster Films) with a fine score from the Alloy Orchestra, based on Vertov's own indications of what he wanted, and a lavish helping of extras. Ian Christie provides a characteristically informative account of Vertov's career, and David Cairns's visual essay supplements it with a more rhapsodic study of the director. Standouts, though, are the four complete Vertov films on the second disc, totalling nearly four hours of supplementary footage. Two of the films, *Kino-Eye* and *Kino-Pravda #21*, predate *Man with a Movie Camera* and show Vertov developing the pioneering techniques that would feed into his best-known film. The other two post-date *Movie Camera*, being Vertov's first excursions into sound. *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass* and *Three Songs About Lenin* still display the director's ingenuity and technical creativity, but the avant-garde element is in retreat, and the contents are starting to be ballasted with cumbersome propaganda. The 100-page booklet fills out the whole picture yet further, with a generous selection of writings by and about Vertov.

1900 (NOVECENTO)

Bernardo Bertolucci; Italy/France 1976; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 315 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: two short video featurettes with Bernardo Bertolucci and Vittorio Storaro, 1975 on-set documentary 'Bertolucci secondo il cinema', 48-page booklet including archive Bertolucci interviews and notes by Philip Concannon

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

On the back of worldwide commercial and critical acclaim for 1972's *Last Tango in Paris*, Bernardo Bertolucci aimed for the stars with this epic tale encapsulating 50 years of Italian social upheaval. Set on an Emilia estate not unlike the one where he spent his own childhood, it's a huge undertaking, one that manifests his soaring ambition to conjoin the star-driven, novelistic sweep of a Hollywood spectacle with early Soviet cinema's drive to put the proletarian consciousness in the narrative



Class of 1900: Novecento

spotlight. Since his colours are nailed firmly to the peasant mast throughout, the result does at times feel more like an illustrated lecture than a living, breathing drama, and as such never really captures the emotions as intended.

Still, his preferred five-hour-plus cut (some 68 minutes longer than the theatrical release he assembled in response to producer Alberto Grimaldi's barely seen, brutally reduced 184-minute version) allows us to appreciate far more nuance than the film has often been given credit for. Yes, it's an unwieldy beast, but there's a fully developed thesis here, showing the fascist nightmare essentially funded by landowners fearful of workers' nascent political consciousness, suggesting that the horrifying violence of Donald Sutherland's black-shirted monster is rooted in frustration at remaining socially subservient to that very same upper class, and illustrating the corrosive cost of the boss's fascist pact through Robert De Niro's subtle performance as the morally imploding *padrone*.

Disc: A lustrous transfer captures every facet of Vittorio Storaro's cinematography, from the golden-hued country summers of yore to the grey, overcast tones of Mussolini's Italy. The Bertolucci featurettes are a holdover from a previous DVD issue, but the real prize here is a 1975 on-set documentary by Gianni Amelio that eavesdrops unhindered on the shoot in a way that simply wouldn't happen today. It also shows De Niro and co-stars Dominique Sanda and Gérard Depardieu speaking English dialogue, which illustrates the tricky question of choosing between the two audio options – the English dub with the main players' own voices, or the subtitled Italian, which somehow feels more authentic to the world of the story but post-synchs the major cast.

OURSELVES ALONE

Brian Desmond Hurst and Walter Summers; UK 1936; Network/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 67 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: notes by Allan Esler Smith (Hurst's great-great nephew), gallery

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It seems remarkable even now that a British studio in the mid-30s bankrolled a drama about Ireland's independence struggle, titled after the English translation of Sinn Féin, though presumably its source in an already successful play (*The Trouble* by Noel Scott and former British army major Dudley Sturrock) and the precedent of John Ford's similarly themed *The Informer* gave the subject matter a certain validity.

The year is 1921, and the story's sympathies, perhaps surprisingly, are equally divided between the IRA men waging a guerrilla campaign of liberation and the Royal Irish Constabulary, backed by the British army's feared Black and Tans, enforcing the status quo. Belfast-born director Brian Desmond Hurst, a Ford protégé in Hollywood before returning to stake out a prolific British career, allows us to understand the idealism of the rebel cause, but also the challenging task facing the authorities in an atmosphere of brutal violence and paranoia.

With genuine night shoots and the actors' breath visible in freezing exteriors, there's more authenticity on show here than in many celluloid offerings of the era, even if the drama is slightly hamstrung by posh English accents in all the key roles and by Antoinette Cellier's sometimes wayward motivations as the landowner's daughter with divided loyalties. Overall, though, an impressive and very welcome revival for a title that was banned in Northern Ireland on its initial release but definitely has claims to be regarded as a key historical title in British cinema's treatment of the Anglo-Irish conflict.

Disc: The print looks very clean in this new transfer.

SCOTT OF THE ANTARCTIC

Charles Frend; UK 1948; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 105 minutes; Certificate U; 1.33:1. Features: interviews with Andrew Davis and Ranulph Fiennes, featurette on Jack Cardiff's cinematography, restoration featurette, John Mills home-movie footage, stills gallery, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Ealing's prestige productions (*Saraband for Dead Lovers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Dunkirk*) always tended to the stiff and self-conscious, and *Scott of the Antarctic* is no exception. The more so since what it's dealing with is classic British stiff-upper-lippery in the face of adversity; and the fact that the adversity (as the film gently hints) is to some degree self-inflicted just makes the response all the more heroic.

As Scott, John Mills – virtually obligatory casting for the role – heads an almost all-male cast, including James Robertson Justice (so eager for the part of 'Taff' Evans that he shaved off his trademark beard) and such stalwarts as Derek Bond, Kenneth More and John Gregson. Other familiar faces – Sam Kydd, a 26-year-old Christopher Lee – show up briefly. Only two women feature at any length: Diana Churchill and Anne Firth, both in 'wife bravely waving husband off to probable death' roles.

Charles Frend's direction is, as ever, stolid and workmanlike. Two factors, though, redeem the film from dullness. Jack Cardiff's Technicolor cinematography (backed by Osmond Borradaile and Geoffrey Unsworth) captures all the austere beauty of the snowscapes – as does the score, one of Vaughan Williams's finest, with a high, wordless soprano expressing the remote implacability of the region. VW would later refashion elements of it into his Seventh Symphony.

Disc: A fine 2K restoration, working from the original Technicolor three-strip, makes the most of the DPs' achievement. Arctic explorer Ranulph Fiennes mounts an

New releases

eloquent defence of Scott, while conductor Andrew Davis enthuses over VW's music, and Jack Cardiff briefly recalls the pleasures and pains of dealing with Technicolor.

THE SOUND BARRIER

David Lean; UK 1952; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 Dual Format; 111 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: filmed interview with David Lean, interview with Geoffrey Wansell

Reviewed by Jo Botting

Aviation – and the heroics it inspires – was a subject that had a great appeal for British filmmakers in the post-war period, with pictures such as *The Net* (1953), *Reach for the Sky* (1956) and *The Man in the Sky* (1957) attempting to convey the thrill and danger of conquering the air. David Lean became fascinated with the idea of breaking the sound barrier, researching the subject in great depth and handing over his notes to Terence Rattigan, who penned this fictional story based loosely on the life of Geoffrey de Havilland.

Rattigan's central character, John Ridgefield, is a man driven by an ambition so fierce that it destroys the lives of those around him, and Ralph Richardson gives a compelling study of obsession in the role. Producer Alexander Korda cannily persuaded Rattigan to replace one of Ridgefield's sons with a daughter, Susan, thus introducing a much needed female perspective into a very masculine world. Ann Todd brings a combination of intelligence and sensitivity to the part, while Nigel Patrick is cast against type as her test-pilot husband. The character that most comes to life, though, is Will Sparks, Ridgefield's chief designer, played with warmth and empathy by Joseph Tomelty, offering a counterpoint to Richardson's blind determination.

While the state-of-the-art aircraft technology now appears antediluvian, the film's message has lost none of its pertinence. Trying to comprehend her father's determination to conquer supersonic flight, Susan asks him, "Is it going to be a blessing to the human race?" and Richardson's response is one that neither explains nor justifies his pursuit: "That's up to the human race."

Disc: A vintage BFI interview with Lean conducted by actress Maureen Pryor from the time of the film's release is a welcome inclusion, and Rattigan biographer Geoffrey Wansell offers some valuable insights into the production.

THREE BROTHERS (TRE FRATELLI)

Francesco Rosi; Italy/France 1980 (released 1981); Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 107 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio Q&A with Rosi at the NFT in 1987 (69 minutes), theatrical trailer (three minutes), brochure with essay by Millicent Marcus (1996), short text by Rosi (1981), Rosi interview by Michel Ciment (1981)

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Francesco Rosi (1922-2015) was the nazz for some two decades: an apparently fearless exposé of corruption, national and local crime and intractable political problems – all of which he framed in superbly crafted movies, often with the character of thrillers and sometimes the flavour of documentary. His early features *La sfida/The Challenge* (1958) and *I magliari/The Weavers* (1959), on chicanery in Neapolitan trading and the plight of Italy's south-to-north



The mourning after: *Tre fratelli*

migrants respectively, set out two constants in his filmmaking agenda, but his reputation was made by *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), an anatomy of the Mafia's hold on Sicily through journalistic research into the assassination of a Mafia kingpin/folk hero. Much of his great work of the 1960s and 1970s is now available in excellent home-video editions, although (oddly) we're still waiting for his Palme d'or winner *Il caso Mattei/The Mattei Affair* (1972) and his peerless thriller about the murders of judges *Cadaveri eccellenti/Illustrious Corpses* (1976). This release of *Tre fratelli/Three Brothers*, the last of his attempts to engage with Italy's chronic political problems, fills another important gap in Rosi availability.

The film takes its lead (but nothing much else) from a Platonov story: three very different brothers have a rare reunion when they convene for the funeral of their mother. Rosi's setting is Puglia, and his main characters are emblematic of Italy's urgent social-political issues in 1980; the underlying concepts are schematic going on allegorical. The bereaved father Donato (Charles Vanel, the essence of peasant dignity) represents stoicism and gentle reserve; his vision of his wife's leavetaking and his flashbacks to their wedding and early married life are near-idyllic, suggesting what all three sons have left behind and lost. The eldest son Raffaele (Philippe Noiret) is a high-court judge in Rome, about to risk his life by agreeing to preside over the trial of murderous leftwing terrorists; he's baffled by the end of respect for life and limb. The second son Rocco (Vittorio Mezzogiorno) runs a boys' reformatory in Naples; he's a utopian with dreams of transcending society's scavenger tendencies. And the youngest son Nicola (Michele Placido), 20 years younger than Raffaele, is a disaffected worker in a Turin car factory, estranged from his wife since she admitted to having a short-term affair; he's likely to lose his job because of his labour activism. The film's most intense clashes and debates are between Raffaele and Nicola.

All three brothers are given dreams in which their hopes and fears are fulfilled. Raffaele imagines being gunned down by terrorists on a public bus; Rocco imagines a rosy future in which society's detritus can be swept away; and Nicola imagines a tough/tender reconciliation with his wife. The dream sequences resonate with Rosi's overall sociological precision about his characters and help offset the sense that the film is ploughing through a schematic analysis

of Italy's agony. But the major antidote to the dialogue's sometimes didactic explicitness is the film's stately visual style and pacing. *Three Brothers* heralds Rosi's decline in the 1980s and 1990s, but it also echoes the strengths of his earlier classics. The engagement with impossibly difficult issues wins through.

Disc: Flawless 2K transfer from the original negative on both the Blu-ray and the DVD. The main extra is an audio recording of a Rosi Q&A at the NFT in 1987, following a screening of his *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*; despite Arrow's heroic attempts to provide visual counterpoints, it's heavy going – and barely touches on *Three Brothers*. Happily the Rosi interview by Michel Ciment in the brochure discusses the film in illuminating detail.

TRY AND GET ME!

Cy Endfield; USA 1950; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray; 92 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Before being blacklisted by the HUAC in 1951 and coming to the UK to remake himself as Stanley Baker's right-hand man, Cy Endfield was for most of the 40s a struggling freelancer stuck doing Joe Palooka and Bowery Boys sequels. That is, until 1950, when he made *The Underworld Story* and *Try and Get Me!*, two of the most shockingly mature and merciless films noirs ever made.

The latter, never previously released on video, began life with the equally tone-deaf title *The Sound of Fury*; the film itself is, particularly by noir standards, virtually a Zola-esque epic of post-war desolation and tumbling-domino destiny. Frank Lovejoy is a jobless family man new to California, who falls in with Lloyd Bridges's slick, daytime-drinking sociopath, and inexorably the duo's petty hold-ups evolve into a full-on kidnapping and murder. At the same time, hotshot bourgeois journalist Richard Carlson and newspaper editor Art Smith instinctively pump the crime spree into a headline frenzy, eventually initiating a massive lynch-mob face-off (employing many hundreds of real-life residents of Phoenix, Arizona, including college lunks) that ends, fearsomely, with a complete abandonment of order.

Jo Pagano's book and script were inspired by a 1933 San Jose incident in which newspaper coverage spurred a crowd to break into a jail and hang two suspects in a city park (covered live by radio reporters), and Endfield's movie captures the steamrolling horror of it, firehoses and tear gas and all, while attending carefully to each character's tortured ethical conflicts.

As with the best noirs, the movie grips with the grim truthfulness of its details – the kids playing on sewer pipes, the cheap renters' village with only one television, the marriage dissolving into nagging sobs with the lack of work. Secondary characters grab you, especially Katherine Locke as a shy spinster somehow roped into a night out with Lovejoy's self-immolating hard-luck case. Visually, the film is paradigmatic, achingly resonant in its framing, filled with inky shadow and sweaty tumult. Indispensable, and as close to a masterpiece as this beloved genre has to offer.

Disc: Reportedly lifted from the sole surviving print owned by Martin Scorsese, the Blu-ray is pungent and formidably clear. **9**

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Eye of the beholder: Ken Russell was a rare talent who did not suffer fools gladly and who burnt more bridges than he built

THE CHAMPAGNE-FUELLED GENERAL

TALKING ABOUT KEN RUSSELL

By Paul Sutton; Buffalo Books; hardback black-and-white edition, 496pp, £30, ISBN 9780993177033; hardback colour expanded edition, 566pp, £45, ISBN 9780993177040

Reviewed by Tim Lucas

Paul Sutton, a lifelong admirer of Ken Russell who assisted on the last of the director's homemade video films, *60 Seconds of Fame* (2006), compiled this hefty verbal history over a ten-year period, which collects the memories of more than 100 friends and colleagues, as well as his own conversations and correspondence with Russell himself. A good deal of this book's most valuable testimony comes from people historians seldom bother to approach: the art directors, set painters, wardrobe assistants, sound recordists, and actors so far down the cast list that they had time to take note of what was really happening on set. Sutton's willingness to speak with so-called 'below-the-line' collaborators as well as name talent results in a refreshingly egalitarian career overview, one that captures not only the physicality involved

in filmmaking but the social layering that exists on any film set. It also results in a remarkably three-dimensional portrait of the artist as a work-in-progress, evolving from film to film while carefully attempting to balance kindness with the need to retain authority with equal assertions of talent and terror. Sutton reaches all the way back to Mercedes Quadros, who at the age of six starred in Russell's first widely seen short, *Amelia and the Angel* (1958), and talks to a dozen people who worked on *Women in Love* (1969) and another 20 who survived *The Devils* (1971). Conspicuously absent are his four wives, but not the awareness impressed by others that the complexion of Russell's work was always very much in debt to the women in his life.

Despite notable exceptions, such as his long-time editor Michael Bradsell, it's common that the contributing witnesses only knew Russell – who, we're reminded, racked up more number one British box-office hits than any other British film director – for a limited period of time. Through these mosaics we can see vividly how the shy young photographer became the *enfant terrible* – how he was changed by personal and professional relationships, and how he needed to change at times to ascend to the next level. We meet the young music lover whose insecurities were

serendipitously well matched to the strengths of his first wife, costume designer Shirley Russell, whose support empowered him to become more than he had been. We see how this increasingly confident but still tender director was toughened by his frequent alliances with the highly combustible actor Oliver Reed, whose capacities for strong drink, womanising and sheer havoc he felt he had to match to command his respect. From this arose the champagne-fuelled general who did not suffer fools (least of all studio executives) gladly and who burnt more bridges than he built. It was also this Russell who lost his most rewarding creative partnership to divorce, and embarked upon a series of emphatically screenwritten films (*Altered States*, 1980; *Crimes of Passion*, 1984; *Whore*, 1991). Inevitably, we also attend his 'unbankable' years, where we must ask ourselves if his early infatuation with *Citizen Kane* (1941) didn't predestine his plummet from the heights of *Tommy*'s success in 1975 to making video movies like *A Kitten for Hitler* (2007) in his own backyard – a professional failure that nevertheless was a human triumph, a period that found him rebuilding some bridges and allowing more love into his life.

We learn from several testimonies that one of Russell's chief deficits was his insistence on

operating the camera, or a camera, though his technical capabilities were rarely as reliable as his eye. There are several anecdotes of Russell's bullheadedness ruining takes, even once causing Derek Jarman's set of the city of Loudon in *The Devils* to be levelled prematurely, as well as a brow-raising report of hardcore male/female couplings being filmed over "two, three days" on the set of *The Music Lovers* (1970), which leaves the reader to decide if this was purposeful work, intended as a catalyst for action that could be seen on screen, or a flagrant misuse of directorial authority. For all this excess – which extends to legends of misbehaviour on the set of *The Devils* and turning a blind eye to method actor Anthony Perkins's freebasing of cocaine on the set of *Crimes of Passion* to find his unforgettable character, the Reverend Peter Shayne – such on-set behaviour was less Russell's undoing than his ability to produce such an opulent entertainment as *Valentino* for a mere \$5 million. Hollywood understands excess, not economy.

Not everyone spoken to liked Russell – as cinematographer Peter Suschitzky notes, "[Russell's] character is stamped all over his films,

From this mosaic of interviews we can see vividly how the shy young photographer became the enfant terrible

for better or for worse" – but having impressions from all sides tends to forgive what a more limited perspective may find unforgivable. What most palpably accumulates as these stories achieve flux is an awareness of how rare such talent is in the dramatic arts, and how, when actors are encouraged to explore their own capabilities "without ceiling" (as Vivian Pickles says), it can engender such devotion as can override hurt feelings, damaged pride, even repeated abuses of that devotion. Particularly touching in this regard is the input of Judith Paris, one of Russell's repertory players, who recounts how her timid, dawning belief in the young director of BBC's *Dante's Inferno* ("I kind of fell in love with him") inspired a trust sorely tested by *The Devils* ("I'd come home at night and get into a bath and I would literally scrub my body to try to get rid of the imagery") and finally reached breaking point when Russell demanded to share the byline of her original play *Weill and Lenya* (2000), which he had signed on to direct – making all they had shared over the past 30-plus years, not to mention her work at hand, feel undervalued. Despite this rocky history, real illumination comes when the book resolves on the unexpected major chord of a photo of Paris proudly helmeted and wholly forgiving at Russell's 2009 Viking funeral.

After first issuing a limited hardcover edition of 542 pages, Sutton reneged on his vow to set his obsession aside for awhile, adding another two-dozen pages of interviews that dropped into his lap, resulting in the current 'expanded edition'. Appropriate to his subject, more is always more, and immensely welcome. **S**

MOVIE JOURNAL

The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971

Jonas Mekas, Columbia University Press, 496pp, £21, ISBN 9780231175579

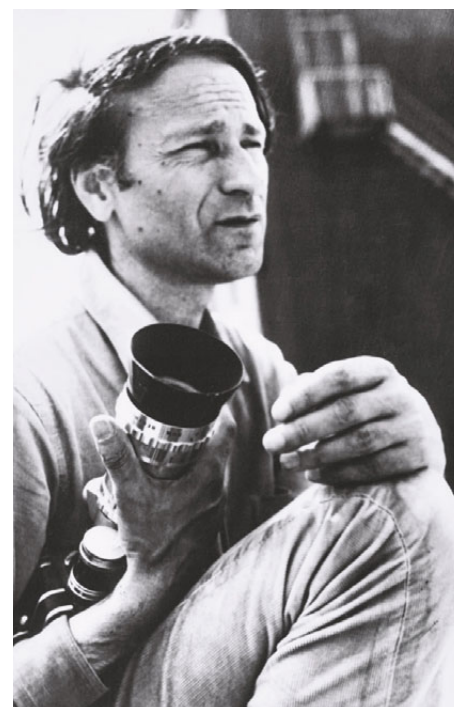
Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Back some years ago when I was a regular stringer for the *Village Voice*, the long-time staff critic J. Hoberman, who'd just been canned by the spineless Voice Media Group management in Phoenix, sent me and the rest of the shell-shocked film section an email requesting that we carry on. It read, in part: "The tradition going back to Jonas Mekas is that the critic sets the agenda. Get as much space to review that which you think is most important and you'll be carrying it on." I'm not sure that any critic at the *Village Voice* film section or anywhere else has that kind of authority today, but you can read Mekas at his exhorting, proselytising, self-dramatising, self-promoting, hectoring, full-throated best in Columbia University's *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971*, a reprint of a long out-of-print collection of Mekas's regular columns in the *Voice*, which appeared at the same time as he was editing *Film Culture* magazine and organising both the Film-Makers' Cooperative and Film-Maker's Cinematheque. The period covered overlaps with that of Andrew Sarris's *Confessions of a Cultist*, but while Sarris had come to the *Voice* at Mekas's behest to write on 'auteur cinema', Mekas was occupied by regularly going into rhapsodies over what he called the New American Cinema, which he lost no opportunity to compare favourably to the product of Hollywood or what he perceived as retrograde, hidebound developments in the European art film.

For some, Mekas was more a bullhorn-brandishing ballyhoo man than a critic, and the public feuds documented herein include some former friends: Cinema 16 film society's Amos Vogel and the writer Parker Tyler, who came to challenge the atmosphere of judgement-free tolerance cultivated by Mekas where, as he wrote in his *Underground Film: A Critical History*, "Every young filmmaker gets unlimited credit for good intentions." (Mekas's effusive rebuttal is included.) For his part, Mekas disavows film criticism every chance he gets in his 'Movie Journal' columns, opining that "the trouble with our cinema is that we have film critics and film reviewers" and letting loose broadsides at newspaper critics who ignore or scorn the Underground. One gets a sense that, in his prime, he would have been a holy terror on Twitter.

Mekas's analysis tends to begin and end with the discovery of, and enthusiasm for, the

You can read Jonas Mekas here at his exhorting, proselytising, self-dramatising, self-promoting, hectoring, full-throated best



The critic sets the agenda: Jonas Mekas

qualities he extols in the films of the young American avant garde: they are "Dionysian", "free", "unconscious", "sensitive" and, most of all, "ecstatic". Rather than the text-anchored, close-reading approach eventually pursued by his understudy P. Adams Sitney, Mekas's columns offer a kind of ecstatic aesthetic autobiography, weekly adventures in perception accompanied by ongoing real-world drama, clandestine meetings with FBI agents and backroom film fest jury skulduggery. In his 1964 columns alone we are told of a contested screening of Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963) at Knokke-Le Zoute in Belgium, the brief life and death of the 55th Street Playhouse as a commercial centre for avant-garde film exhibition, Mekas's two trips to prison for screening *Flaming Creatures* and Jean Genet's *Un chant d'amour* (1950), and the sad saga of filmmaker Ron Rice, locked up in Bellevue, run out of New York and finally dying in Mexico, buried on Christmas day.

Mekas's vocabulary is clear, simple, emphatic and very often repetitive; he might champion nuance and specificity in critical writing, but reading Mekas begs the disturbing question: could he have accomplished all that he has if he had not been so maddeningly, single-mindedly insistent? It is also worth noting that Mekas's uninhibited stream-of-conscience prose takes some very unexpected turns, swerving from the poetic to the humorous. I guffawed often when making my way through the *Movie Journal*, usually when the Kuchar brothers showed up, but never louder than at Mekas's pronouncement that "ninety-five percent of human beings are hopelessly ugly" in a piece titled 'On Nudist Movies'. His own percentages of diamonds-to-dross are somewhat better, and even if he's no great shakes at exegesis, he's a helluva happy historian. **S**



Blood, sweat and tears: Sylvia Sidney became typecast in her movies as a lower-class victim of circumstance

SYLVIA SIDNEY

Paid by the Tear

By Scott O'Brien, BearManor Media, 467pp; hardback, \$39.95, ISBN 9781593939427; paperback, \$29.95, ISBN 9781593939427

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

Sylvia Sidney was a major star of the 1930s and a hard-working character actor well into her old age, but until now she hasn't been the subject of a biography – perhaps because prospective writers were intimidated by her while she was alive. Though she was famous for pitiful victimhood in her movie prime, Sidney became infamous off screen for her flamboyant crankiness, which was most likely a protective stance. As writer-director Richard Kramer, who wrote a role for Sidney on his TV show *thirtysomething* (1987-91), perceptively states in his introduction, “She was never an actual pain in the ass, she just played the part of one.”

O'Brien, who has written books on such neglected 1930s actors as Kay Francis and Ruth Chatterton, is a completist when it comes to detailing the entirety of a career, never stinting on theatre, radio, and TV credits in favour of feature films. This Sidney book, like his others, is packed with rare photos, many of them from Sidney's extensive theatre career, and as such it provides a visual record of how she grew and changed as a performer over time. O'Brien has also laboured to find the surviving people who

knew and worked with Sidney, and comments from these co-workers add texture to her story.


Sidney was born Sophia Kosow in the Bronx in 1910 and she was starring on stage at the age of 16, going on to earn a reputation as a hellcat and a bit of a vamp. Sidney was eventually signed to a contract at Paramount by movie mogul B.P. Schulberg, and she became a star in three movies in 1931 that carefully emphasised all of her assets as a downtrodden emotional actress: Rouben Mamoulian's *City Streets*, Josef von Sternberg's *An American Tragedy* and King Vidor's *Street Scene*. Off screen, Sidney was supposedly having an affair with the married Schulberg, an alliance that became so well known that it was alluded to in the press both by columnists and by Schulberg and Sidney themselves, though in later years she insisted he “never laid a finger on me”.

Sidney became typecast in her movies as the lower-class victim of circumstance, and audiences became accustomed to seeing her shed copious tears as her characters were sent to jail over and over again, but she leavened her suffering with a smile that seemed to take over her heart-shaped face. Her career reached its peak with two masterpieces in a row:

Audiences became accustomed to seeing her shed copious tears as her characters were sent to jail over and over again

Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936), in which she plays Spencer Tracy's distressed fiancée, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Sabotage* (1936), where she is Mrs Verloc, a woman helplessly driven to murder her terrorist husband (Oscar Homolka) because he was responsible for the death of her brother. Sidney was unhappy with Hitchcock's purely technical direction, but Mrs Verloc is her most memorably tragic screen performance.

Sidney again excelled in Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937), but had made herself unpopular in Hollywood and by 1940 had returned to the theatre. There were some half-hearted attempts at movie comebacks, but by the 1950s Sidney was acting to survive on stage and on TV, and she wasn't too proud to stand in line for unemployment insurance when work was scarce. She made a real comeback in *Summer Wishes, Winter Dreams* (1973), and parts came steadily for her after that, including one in Tim Burton's *Beetlejuice* (1988) that won her some new young fans.

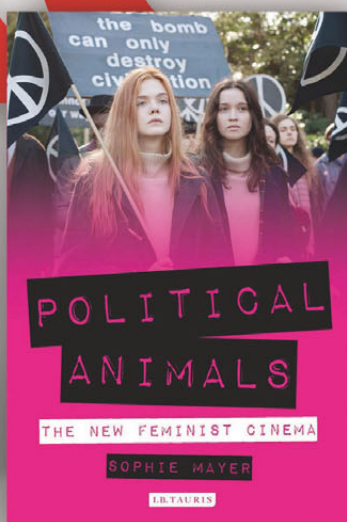
Sidney's only son Jody, who was a maths and science prodigy, died in 1985 from the neuromuscular disease ALS, and she was often working to take care of him as well. She herself died of throat cancer in 1999, still smoking the cigarettes that had lowered her formerly high and plaintive voice to a gravelly baritone. O'Brien's book lets us see all the different stages of Sidney's lengthy life and career, providing some welcome insight into the jabbing toughness she needed to cultivate in order to survive in show business as long as she did. 

Read



NATALIE WOOD

By Rebecca Sullivan, BFI Publishing/
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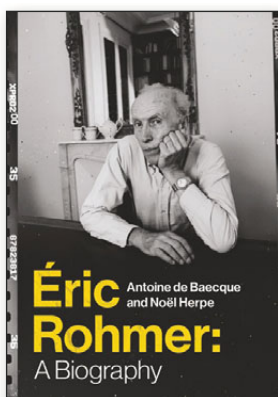
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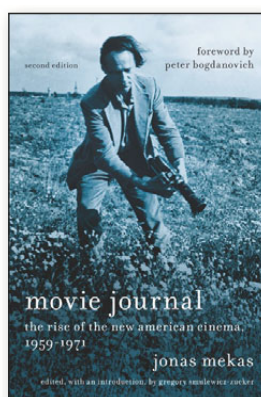
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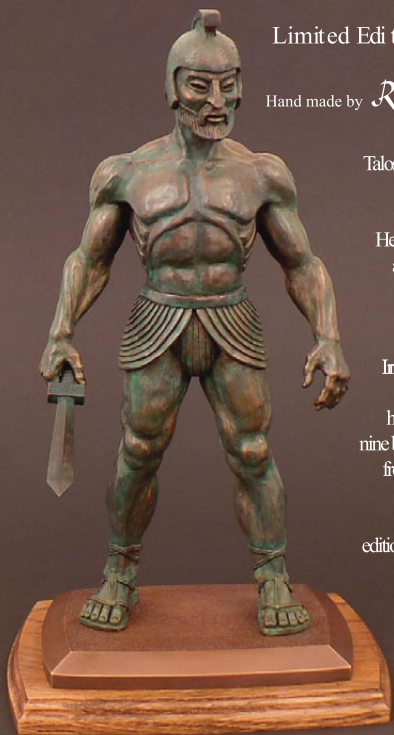
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THIS CHARMING MAN

I was very sorry to read of the recent death of the British filmmaker and screenwriter John Krish. I had the good luck to meet John when I was researching my book on the Children's Film Foundation (CFF). He gave me a wonderful interview, full of fascinating stories and bold opinions – not all of them publishable! He cared passionately about cinema for children, as well as about documentary as a form. He was also a charming and witty man; he will be sorely missed.

I can only urge those who are unfamiliar with the work of this underrated director to look at luminous documentaries such as *I Think They Call Him John* (1964) or his CFF titles such as *Out of the Darkness* (1985) to discover a filmmaker with a keen eye and a warm heart.

Robert Shail Northern Film School, Leeds Beckett University

JOURNEY TO THE WEST

In your otherwise excellent cover story on the western ('The psychological western', S&S, May), you neglected to mention two more fine examples of the genre: *Gunman's Walk* (1958) and *Last Train from Gun Hill* (1959).

The former features Van Heflin as a rancher who must confront and kill his murderous son. The latter features Kirk Douglas as a sheriff who falls out with an old friend (played by Anthony Quinn) over Quinn's criminal son.

Last Train from Gun Hill is also notable as one of the earliest westerns to confront racial prejudice.

Edward O'Reilly Dublin, Ireland

VISIONS OF ALBION

In his editorial ('Abominable showmen', S&S, June) Nick James does not mention the original *House of Cards* based on Michael Dobbs's novel and scripted by Andrew Davies, which aired on British TV in 1993. The two versions have significant similarities in their plots including Urquhart/Underwood both being willing to murder their respective female journalist informants. The focus on the twisted protagonist hardly began with *The Sopranos*, since that series dates from a pilot in 1997. We should not make the mistake of crediting the US with inventing ground-breaking television drama. After all, Troy Kennedy Martin's *Edge of Darkness*, the most radical of political thrillers, dates from 1985.

Roger Crittenden High Wycombe

A TRUE ROMANCE

I won't comment on calls by some police forces in the US for a boycott of Quentin Tarantino's excellent eighth feature, except to say I agree with Kim Morgan ('The S&S Interview', S&S, February) that the situation became ridiculous. Nor will I comment on the usual racial backlash that accompanies Tarantino's films of the esteemed director. He does a great job of standing up for himself on these occasions.

I've seen countless films as a result of following

LETTER OF THE MONTH ALONE IN THE DARK



Marisol Grandon's terrific article ('Fantastic Voyages', S&S, May) has certainly left me enthused about the possibilities of virtual reality and cinema. An opportunity to visit dinosaurs on *Jurassic World* or run shoulder to shoulder with *The Avengers* is very enticing.

However, the new technology does sit awkwardly with the idea that cinema is a sacred collective experience. The wearing of

a headset will deny the very simple pleasure of watching an audience's reaction.

Witnessing the laughter on my young son's face at BB-8's antics and the look of awe as the X-wings made the jump to light speed in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015, above) is part of the magic of cinema, one which VR would sadly obscure.

Richard Sherwood-Farnfield Maidstone

up recommendations and cross-referencing from the many books about Tarantino – as well as interviews with him and his own movies. This interview has made me seek out even more and made me want to hunt down a good few TV episodes too. Thank you.

Scott A. Macgregor By email

WISE GUY

Generous tributes have been paid to Guy Hamilton (16 September 1922 – 20 April 2016) as the director who gave the Bond films their hallmark style in *Goldfinger* (1964) and worked with Roger Moore to define a new image for the central character. Desmond Llewelyn talked of the key that Guy gave him for characterising 'Q' – the advice that Q hated Bond for smashing up the beautiful toys he had constructed. This approach guided Llewelyn through all his subsequent appearances.

The obituaries mentioned Guy's early association with Carol Reed, who called him the best assistant director he ever had. However, the impression given in them is that Guy went straight from *The Third Man* (1949) and *Outcast of the Islands* (1951) to *Goldfinger*. This is erroneous.

After his directorial debut on *The Ringer* (1952) for Korda's London Film Productions, Guy went on to direct *The Intruder* (1953) for the same company. This was an Ivan Foxwell

production. Their association was continued on three subsequent films Guy directed, with both men having script credits on each of them: *The Colditz Story* (1955), *Manuela* (1957) and *A Touch of Larceny* (1959). In a warm tribute to Foxwell following his death in 2002, Guy wrote that Ivan had no wish to direct and he himself had no wish to be a producer; consequently they enjoyed an effective collaboration. Guy was a fervent advocate of ensuring that the script was of the highest quality before embarking on production; paradoxically, he told me he disliked directing scenes he had written himself because he felt he lacked objectivity on them.

The close association Guy enjoyed with Foxwell was reproduced in the relations, of a somewhat different nature, that he enjoyed with Bond producers Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman. Guy was a believer in filmmaking as a team effort, albeit with himself as the team leader.

Timothy Gee by email

Additions and corrections

June p.58 *Arabian Nights Volume Three The Enchanted One*, Certificate 15, 125m 19s; p.62 *Heart of a Dog*, Certificate PG, 76m 19s; p.64 *The Sky Trembles and the Earth Is Afraid and the Two Eyes Are Not Brothers*, Certificate 12A, 95m 7s; p.66 *Breaking the Bank*, Certificate 12A, 105m 17s; p.67 *Cabin Fever*, Certificate 15, 98m 36s; p.71 *Departure*, Certificate 15, 108m 20s; p.80 *Journey to the Shore*, Certificate 12A, 128m 15s; p.81 *The Jungle Book*, USA 2016, ©Disney Enterprises, Inc, Disney presents, A Fairview Entertainment production, A Jon Favreau film; p.85 *Our Kind of Traitor*, Certificate 15, 107m 36s; p.86 *Race*, Certificate PG, 134m 38s; p.92 *The Trust*, Certificate 15, 91m 32s

ENDINGS...

4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS



The ambiguous final moments of Cristian Mungiu's bleak, brilliant Romanian New Wave drama avoid explicit moralising

By Nick Roddick

Scarcely had he picked up his Palme d'Or for *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* than Cristian Mungiu was joking about the "mandatory table scene" in the New Romanian Cinema. And with good reason: for a while, it was almost impossible to get through a film from the country without seeing its main characters gathered round a table to eat, argue or just talk.

The most striking such scene is in *4 Months...* itself, in which Otilia (played by Anamaria Marinca) is trapped at a birthday dinner for her boyfriend's mother. Given that she has just been present at the hotel-room abortion of her roommate, Gabita (Laura Vasiliu), and has had to have sex with the abortionist as part of the fee, it is hardly surprising she is uncomfortable.

Mungiu shoots the scene in a continuous seven-minute take. Most of those speaking are out of shot. Otilia says nothing, sitting slightly right of centre, picked out by the most discreet of key lights. But you never take your eyes off her. Mungiu's fixed-shot, single-take style does what the Dogme directors banged on about but rarely achieved. Cinema is reduced to its essentials: an actor (or actors), a frame and a soundtrack. The shot is justly famous. Less noted is the fact that Mungiu ends the film with a kind of inverted reprise.

In between the two scenes, Otilia returns


to the hotel room, disposes of the foetus, goes back to look after Gabita and finds she is no longer in the room. She tracks her down to a deserted section of the hotel restaurant (a wedding party, their outlines visible through the glass partition, occupy the other half). Another meal, this time almost without dialogue, provides the film with its coda.

The second scene is shorter: two minutes and 35 seconds, again without cuts or camera movements. Gabita is seated in profile at a table left of frame, smoking, with an empty plate and an open bottle of mineral water in front of her. She dismisses her friend's concern at her being up and about so soon after the procedure. "I was starving," she says. Otilia sits down opposite her. The scene has a monochrome look, with Otilia's green sweater and the green bottle the only concessions to colour. Gabita asks if the foetus has been disposed of. Eventually, Otilia replies, "We are never going to talk about this again." The waiter brings a plate of food. "The wedding menu," he proclaims. "Beef, pork fillet, liver, breaded brains, marrow..." It's a queasy moment of jet-black comedy that deliberately pokes at audience sensitivities following the visceral impact of all that has gone before – part of a slim seam of black humour that runs through *4 Months...*, notably in the naming of the sinister abortionist, Mr Bebe.

Otilia asks the waiter for a glass, which he

Mungiu does what the Dogme directors banged on about but rarely achieved. Cinema is reduced to its essentials

eventually brings. She pours herself some water. The women sit in silence. Car headlights move through the room: there is evidently a window where the camera is positioned. When one car engine is especially loud – precise sound design is a feature of Mungiu's films – Otilia turns towards it and the screen cuts to black with almost audible finality. The main credits roll in total silence for 25 seconds, before a ludicrously inappropriate Romanian popular song from the 1980s, 'Te aud mereu', kicks jauntily in for the remainder of the crawl. The effect is irresistibly comic, as if Bucks Fizz were suddenly to start singing over the credits of Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997).

But what gives the scene its quiet power is the positioning of the women at the table. Like the camera, they are 'locked off'. The almost silent confrontation between them could be read a number of ways. It could suggest Otilia's frustration at Gabita's fecklessness; or Gabita's apparent indifference to what has happened; or the static bleakness of the half-lit dining room in contrast to the wedding party beyond. But only we the viewers can supply such interpretations: the film itself shows but does not tell. Indeed, even to suggest interpretations is a kind of betrayal. Moral issues permeate *4 Months*, but the film itself strenuously avoids explicit moralising – another key characteristic of the Romanian New Wave. And this final scene – bleak, listless, a quiet conclusion to an everyday tragedy – presents us one last time with the film's two main characters. Here they are. They did what they did. And? 

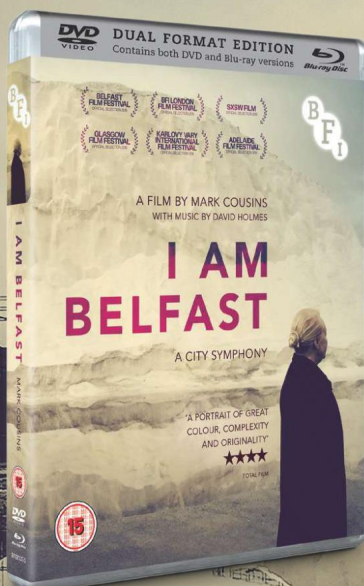
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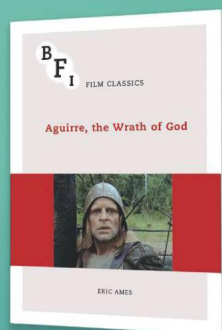


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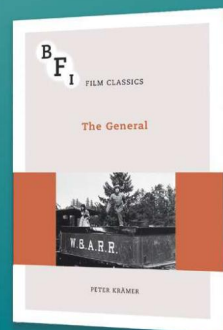
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